

Anarchy Trek

Season 1

Todd Borho

Anarchy Trek

Dramatis Personae

Blackjack – Bling species - Looks like a fat parrot with zebra stripes. Male. Has arms and legs. Eats, drinks, and breathes somewhat like humans.

Pokher – Tippity species - Looks like a lizard walking upright with a swordfish for a face. Eats, drinks, and breathes somewhat like a human. Female

Blue – Swig Species - Floating, pulsing ball. Female. Communicates via color changes. Moves objects with telekinesis. Absorbs nutrients from various plants and animals by touching them and absorbing them. Also absorbs water.

Tom - Human

Pixel – Species is part synthetic, so was created by another, unknown species. Known as “The Verse” species due to their versatility in rapid shape-shifting. Are found in many parts of the universe. Pixel was created on Planet Bling. Consists of trillions of particles, part biological, part synthetic. Male. Absorbs energy from the atmosphere. Doesn’t eat, drink, or breathe.

Episode 1

Scene 1

An interstellar star ship, “The Blazing Muffin”, with a small crew of non-human, sentient life forms is approaching Earth. They are in search of a new crew member. Blackjack, Pokher, Blue, and Pixel are gathered in the main piloting and navigation area of the ship. There is a large screen on one of the walls.

Blackjack: Ok, we’re close enough. Let’s take a look at what’s going on down there. Computer, give us some good news.

Computer: Hold on....this might take a while.

Pokher: Computer, why is that?

Computer: Well, it appears that billions of sentient life forms believe in the legitimacy of a violence-based ruling class.

Blue: Ah, great. Another planet full of slaves. I told you we were wasting our time here.

Pixel: Blue, stop being so negative. Computer, are there any life forms down there that know what freedom is and why it’s essential in the universe?

Computer: Yes, there are a few conscious anarchists.

Blackjack: Great! Let's find one and see if they want to join us!

Blue: Are we gonna go down there?

Pokher: That could be a little dangerous. We don't wanna freak any of them out.

Pixel: We could just beam one of them up and see if they're interested.

Blackjack (thoughtful): Hmmm, that's a bit too close to kidnapping, I'm afraid.

Pixel: We beam them up for five minutes, ask them if they wanna travel with us. They say yes, we book it out of here. They say no, we say sorry and beam them back.

Blue: I have a compromise. Get a message to them through one of their communication devices. Just ask them if they wanna check out our star ship and meet us.

Computer: I might remind you that nobody on that planet knows about interstellar travel or sentient life forms outside their own. They might think it's a joke.

Blue: Well, I say it's worth a shot.

Blackjack: Yeah, I agree with Blue. Computer, find us a good candidate and send him a message.

A few minutes later on Earth, a young computer scientist named Tom gets a text message on his phone. The message reads:

Hi, Tom. This is a crew of aliens visiting your planet. Wanna come have a look at our ship?

Tom, thinking it's a joke, laughs hysterically. Then, he responds:

Sure. Why not?

The crew of The Blazing Muffin is elated, and they quickly beam him on board. Tom looks around at the alien crew. He is very confused.

Tom: I haven't done any drugs recently. How can this be happening?

The aliens look at him quizzically.

Blackjack: Computer, are our translators working correctly?

Computer: Oops! Sorry about that. Should be fine now.

Blackjack: Is it male or female?

Computer: He is a 30 year old male named Tom. His work field of expertise is computer science.

Blackjack: Hello, Tom. Thank you for accepting our invitation! Welcome to The Blazing Muffin.

Tom: The Blazing Muffin?

Blackjack: That's the name of the ship.

Tom: Why?

Pokher: Well, it's blazing fast and kinda shaped like a muffin, so....

Tom: Makes sense.

Pokher: So my name, in your language, or at least the closest approximation, is Pokher. The one that spoke to you first is Blackjack.

Tom: Why Blackjack?

Blackjack: I just want you to be able to pronounce it.

Tom: What is it in your language?

Blackjack: !\$#%-&&(**!-__ :)

Tom: Blackjack it is.

Blue: I'm Blue.

Tom: Why are you always changing colors?

Blue: That's how I communicate.

Tom: So why are you called Blue?

Blue: That's what my family chose. Why are you called Tom?

Tom: Same reason.

Blackjack: Lastly, is Pixel. Pixel is made of trillions of quasi-biological particles that shapeshift as necessary or as desired. We are a small crew of anarchists that travel the universe to learn about other worlds, trade, and live the life. Would you like to join us?

Tom looks down at Earth.

Tom: Wow, I'm really above the Earth. (looks at Blackjack) Are you serious?

Blackjack: Yes, of course. Well, your knowledge of computer science will be very primitive by our standards, but I'm sure you will learn quickly.

Tom: You're anarchists?

Pokher: Yep, that's the main reason we chose you. There aren't many on your planet, huh?

Tom: That's an understatement.

Tom looks at Earth again, then back to the aliens.

Blue: Is it really that hard of a decision? You're basically choosing between freedom and slavery right now.

Tom: Well, when ya put it like that, sure! I'll go!

Blackjack: Sweet! Let's get out of here! Computer, set a course for the Lechuga System, Zip Factor Five!

The Blazing Muffin streaks away from Earth.

End Episode 1

Episode 2

Scene 1

The Blazing Muffin is streaking through space, on their way to the Lechuga star system. The crew is helping their first human, Tom, acclimate to life on a starship.

Tom: So I'm breathing oxygen right now.

Pixel (currently in the shape of a human): Yes, partly. The air on the ship is within range of what you can breathe.

Tom: What are you breathing?

Pixel: I don't breath. I absorb energy from the environment.

Tom: Like a plant?

Pixel: Not exactly, but if that makes it easier for you to comprehend, then sure. Blackjack and Pokher own the ship, and they breathe roughly the same air as humans, so that's why you're ok without a breather.

Tom: A breather?

Pixel: Yeah, Blue has nanoparticles in her breathing apparatus that adapt the air for her. You'll need some, too, if you go to another planet. Now, on to food and drink. You hungry?

Tom: Starving.

They're interrupted by a message from Blackjack.

Blackjack: Hey, you two should come up to the bridge. We've got company.

Pixel: Good or bad company?

Blackjack: Don't know yet.

Pixel and Tom walk a funky, multi-colored corridor, past a few machines and screens, make a right, and arrive at the bridge. Blackjack, Blue, and Pokher are observing the large view screen. On screen is a starship, oddly shaped, kind of like a 20th century Earth table lamp.

Computer: They're calling.

Pokher: Go ahead, put them on screen.

Two large, smirking creatures appear on screen.

Tom: They look like trees, but with fur and cat faces.

Blackjack: Hello! I'm not familiar with your species. What is your ethical code?

Tom (whispers to Blue): You don't ask for their names first?

Blue: If they're a bunch of immoral thugs, we don't want anything to do with them, so why ask?

Tom ponders this.

One of the creatures replies.

Creature 1: We are members of the Coalition of United Planets Galaxies And Star Systems. You are unregistered. You must assimilate.

Blackjack (groans): Ah, great. CUPGASS. Well, that tells me all I need to know. Computer, shields up, let's book it!

The alien ship shoots at them and pursues.

Tom: They're shooting at us!

Pixel: Are you surprised? They're CUPGASS!

Tom: What's CUPGASS?

Pokher: The Coalition of United Planets Galaxies and Star Systems, the biggest government in the galaxy!

Blackjack: Computer, target the anti-engine, heat resistant goo gun at their main engine.

Tom: Wow, what is that?

Blue: A gun that clogs up engines with heat resistant goo.

Tom: The name is quite accurate in its description.

Computer: They don't have an engine.

Pokher: What? That's absurd!

Computer: Just kidding. Target locked on.

Blackjack: Fire!

Giant blobs of heat resistant goo fly through space and hit one of the main engines of the lamp-shaped craft. This slows it down enough to make an escape.

Blackjack: Computer, remind me to deprogram that sense of humor out of you later.

Computer: What?

Blackjack: Just kidding.

Tom: Great. I survived my first space battle!

Blackjack: Ok, on to Lechuga Prime!

Tom: Lechuga? That's weird.

Pokher: Why is that weird?

Tom: Lechuga means "lettuce" in Spanish, an Earth language. What are the odds of that?

Pokher: What were the odds of you getting picked up by a bunch of alien anarchists today?

Tom: Good point.

Scene 2

The Blazing Muffin is approaching Lechuga Prime.

Tom (looking at view screen): You've gotta be kidding me! The planet looks like a head of lettuce! What are the odds of that?

Pixel: Why are you so fascinated with odds?

Blue: And lettuce?

Tom: I'm not...it's just...never mind. Have you guys been here before?

Blackjack: Yep, we love it. We might take a look at Lechuga Subprime while we're here, too.

Tom: Lechuga Subprime?

Pokher: Yeah, that's a smaller planet nearby. The people there are all slaves to a violence-based ruling class.

Tom: What about Lechuga Prime?

Blue: A much larger planet with an anarchist population.

Blackjack: Enough talk. We're here. Let's get down to Lechuga Prime!

Tom: What are we here for?

Blackjack: Supplies, social visits, and any other pleasurable pursuits we might find agreeable.

Tom: Sweet. Can I go?

Pokher: You stay here and guard the ship.

Computer: He's new, what possible use could he be?

Tom (offended): Hey!

Computer: I can guard myself.

Blackjack: How many times do I have to tell you computer, you're not the entire ship!

Pixel: Nothing worse than a computer with an ego. I'll stay and guard the ship. Let the new guy go to Lechuga Prime.

Pokher: Ok Tom, if you wanna go, you'll need to breathe in some nanoparticles to help you breathe the atmosphere.

Tom (enthusiastic): Great, bring it on!

A robot brings out a tray with a small line of white powder on it. Tom looks at it skeptically and hesitates. The others watch impatiently.

Blue: What's the problem?

Tom: It looks kind of like, um...

Blackjack: Spit it out. We haven't got all day!

Computer: I believe his hesitation is produced by a psychological reflex.

Blackjack: Explain.

Computer: There is a white stimulant on earth that looks very similar. It produces brief rushes of energetic euphoria and is violently suppressed.

Pokher: Yeah, well, that's not what it is Tom. Just snort it so we can get going!

Tom snorts the white powder and the white powder sets up shop in his lungs.

Pixel: There, now you can safely breathe the atmosphere of the known 7,788 worlds with sentient life in The Milky Way Galaxy, plus or minus ten.

Tom: Plus or minus ten? That's not very comforting. I'll be fine on Lechuga Prime, right?

Computer: Highly likely. Now get going.

Blackjack: Ok, computer, beam all of us down except for Pixel.

Blackjack, Pokher, Blue, and Tom all disappear, then reappear on Lechuga Prime. They're in the middle of a busy marketplace. The thing that gets Tom's attention first is what appear to be heads of lettuce floating, flying, and jumping around.

Tom: Whoa! What's with all the autonomous lettuce?

Pokher: They're the locals.

Tom (shocked disbelief): Aw, come on! The planet is called Lechuga and the people are shaped like lettuce! How is this possible?

One of the locals stops and hovers between Tom and Blackjack.

It talks to them telepathically: Why is it people assume that sentient life has to have two arms and two legs?

Everyone laughs except Tom.

Blackjack: Tom, this is a friend of mine. You won't be able to pronounce his name, but in your language the rough translation is "The Dealer".

Tom: Why do you call him "The Dealer"?

The Dealer: Blackjack, is this his first time off world?

Blackjack: Yeah, we just picked him up from Earth.

The Dealer: Never heard of it. Anyway, glad you guys are here. Are you interested in business or pleasure first?

Half say business, the other half pleasure.

The Dealer: Ok, I'll pick. On to business.

Half of them grumble.

The Dealer: Oh yeah, before we get started, did you happen to see any of our long lost cousins from Lechuga Subprime on your way here?

Pokher (perplexed): No. Why?

The Dealer: Word is that they've attempted a bunch of raids lately. They've all been repelled as far as I know, but if you guys came alone, then who knows, ya know?

The Dealer suddenly drops to the ground and starts rolling around.

Tom: What are you doing, Dealer?

Dealer: Doing my nutrient grab.

Pokher: All the Lechugas here have to roll around in the soil at least three times a day to absorb nutrients.

Tom: They don't eat?

Dealer: Do you see a mouth?

Meanwhile, back on The Blazing Muffin, Pixel gets an alert from the computer.

Computer: Pixel, we are being approached by a number of unknown ships, and they're very strange.

Pixel: How many, and what do you mean 'strange'?

Computer: If my sensors are correct, they number in the trillions.

Pixel: What?! How is that possible?

Computer: Because they are only a few centimeters each.

Pixel: We're encountering a new sentient life form with trillions of spaceships?

Computer: It appears so.

Pixel: Shields up.

Computer: No kidding. Wait, I'm also sensing two ships about the same size as ours flanking the swarm of smaller ships. They are from Lechuga Subprime.

Pixel: Put them on screen.

A swarm of trillions of mini-spaceships appears on screen, flanked by two Lechuga Subprime Raiders.

Pixel: Call Blackjack now.

A moment later, Blackjack's voice comes over the comm system.

Blackjack: This had better be good.

Pixel: It's not. It's very bad. We've got company.

To be continued.....

Episode 3

Scene 1

Pixel is the only one on The Blazing Muffin. He is in orbit around Lechuga Prime while his shipmates are on the surface. The Blazing Muffin is being approached by two Lechuga Subprime Raiders and trillions of miniature spaceships. Pixel has just contacted Blackjack on the surface.

Blackjack: What kind of company?

A garbled reply comes back.

Pixel (garbled): Attempting to beam you back.

Blackjack: Damn quantum communicators! (pause) Hey, didn't you sell me those, Dealer?

Dealer conveniently says nothing.

Computer: The mini-ships have dispersed and are attempting to surround us.

Pixel: Call 'em!

Computer: Which one?

Pixel: All of them! Whoever answers first, we'll talk to them. And why can't we beam up the crew?

Computer: The mini-ships are interfering with our attempts. One of the mini-ships is responding to our call.

Pixel: On screen now!

A tiny blip appears on the screen.

Pixel: Magnify to where I can actually see them.

The picture is magnified. An insect resembling an Earth mosquito appears on the screen. It is wearing an absurd amount of military regalia.

Pixel: Hey, I'm Pixel.

Mosquito-like alien: I'm Captain Stingus Maximus, servant of Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture.

Pixel (sarcastic): Well, your grand modesty, can I ask why you're interfering with my ship's functions and surrounding my ship?

Captain Stingus: We seek tribute for Lord Emperor....

Pixel cuts him off: Yeah, yeah. You want to rob me. And you brought two Lechuga Subprime ships with you? Let me guess, your governments have reached an agreement to help each other pillage around the universe.

Captain Stingus: You dare insult our grand empire! You have two choices, you can submit and give tribute, or we will be forced to board you and commandeer your ship.

Pixel: You mean steal. (hits mute button on control panel)

Pixel: Computer, what are my chances of getting out of this?

Computer: Very poor.

Pixel: All weapons are online?

Computer: Yep, but their ships are dispersed too widely to effect all of them.

Pixel: Even the warbling sonic shockwave cannon?

Computer: Yes, even the warbling sonic shockwave cannon. They're firing at us, by the way.

Pixel: Ok, fire everything we've got at them, then send an emergency message to the crew on the ground, and get us out of here!

Computer: Got it. How fast?

Pixel: Faster than them!

On the viewscreen, it looks like a psychedelic laser light show.

Computer: Good news! So we managed to disable over fifty percent of their armada, including the Lechuga ships.

Pixel: That's great!

Computer: Bad news! Our shields are damaged, and now we're starting to be boarded by some of the little buggers.

Pixel: Get us out of here now!

The Blazing Muffin speeds away in a blinding flash and is pursued by a portion of the armada.

Pixel: Did you send the emergency message to the ground crew?

Computer: Yeah, they should receive it in a few minutes.

Meanwhile, on Lechuga Prime.....

The Dealer: Hey, I just got word from a friend of mine that works private orbital security. He said there was a small star cruiser that just fled a massive little armada, if that makes sense.

Blackjack: If he saw it, why didn't he do anything to help?

The Dealer: He said he would have, but you were parked so far out that it was outside of his normal scope of observation. Why did you park so far out, anyway?

Blackjack: I didn't think it mattered!

Pokher: I knew we should have done a closer orbit.

The Dealer: Anyway, my friend got some bounty hunters on the case and they're pursuing your ship along with whoever those tiny aggressors are. He's staying behind with some other orbital security professionals to deal with those that remained behind.

They're interrupted by a loud thunking noise on the ground near them. They all put their attention on a small sphere that just crash landed a few feet from them.

Tom: What the hell is that?

Blackjack: An emergency message in a bottle from The Blazing Muffin!

Blackjack scurries over and picks up the sphere, opens it, and pulls out a cylinder from inside. He starts turning the cylinder, which gives an electronic message as he slowly turns it. The message shows fast video clips of what just happened on The Blazing Muffin, and then shows text that reads:

WE JUST GOT ATTACKED BY A BUNCH OF VIOLENT CONTROL FREAKS
COULDN'T BEAM YOU UP
DISABLED A LOT OF THOSE PESKY LITTLE VERMIN
GOT BOARDED BY A COUPLE DOZEN OF THEM
FLED THE SCENE
HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON

BEST

THE BLAZING MUFFIN

Tom: Whoa, they looked like mosquitoes!

Blue: Like what?

Tom: A super annoying earth insect. There were so many of them! It was like a Mosquito Armada!

Blackjack: Dealer, can you take us up to have a look at the situation? Maybe deal with the disabled members of the Mosquito Armada and help me get my ship back?

Dealer: Gee, I dunno, man. I've got an appointment with my leaf trimmer, then I have to....

Blackjack cuts him off: Great friend you are!

Dealer: Just kidding, man! My ship's on autopilot coming to meet us now. You're so uptight! When we get back, I know a great masseuse for ya.

Blackjack: You're such a &^(**!

Meanwhile, back on The Blazing Muffin, Pixel has divided itself into dozens of parts in an effort to thwart the invaders. He has also deployed some of the robot cleaning crew to pursue them as well, under the control of the computer.

Computer (commenting on one of the robots attempting to vacuum up one of the invaders): Vacuum's are so archaic! You wasted time and resources printing those up.

Pixel: Just because something is old, doesn't mean it doesn't work well.

One of the robots is successful in vacuuming up one of the invaders.

Computer: Wow! It actually caught one!

Pixel: Have it shot out the airlock immediately!

Pixel pulses and flashes as it attacks one of the invaders.

Pixel: Ha ha! Gotcha!

Computer: What did ya do to it?

Pixel: Fried it with a nano energy burst. How many are still on board?

Computer: Well, there were two dozen before you and a cleaning bot each caught one, so do the math.

Pixel: Could you please lose the attitude at a time like this?

Computer: Oh, fine.

A bit later, Dealer's ship is helping some other Lechuga vessels deal with the Mosquito Armada. Most of the Mosquito Armada are fleeing once they get their systems back online, while others remain immobile. Dealer is attempting to contact one of the Lechuga Subprime ships.

Dealer: The nerve to not answer my call after they....

Voice comes over Dealer's ship's speakers.

Voice: Hello?

Dealer: Hey, this is Dealer from Lechuga Prime.

Voice interrupts: Do you have me on speaker?

Dealer: Yeah...

Voice: I hate that!

Dealer: So you guys found some new violence-based culture to team up with and attack peaceful anarchists?

Tom (mockingly): And a bunch of little mosquitoes, too.

Dealer (to Tom): Hey, stay out of this, new guy!

Voice: We have formed a mutually beneficial alliance with Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture.

Blackjack: Why do control freaks always love fancy titles?

Pokher: Truly baffling.

Blue: Lechuga Subprime is a member of CUPGASS. Do they know about this alliance you've got going on? And I didn't get your name.

Voice: Captain Slipup.

Tom laughs hysterically. He's given quizzical looks. Blue pulses disapprovingly.

Captain Slipup: You wouldn't report me to CUPGASS about this, would you?

Blackjack: I'd never ask a giant mafia for help. We'll handle our own problems.

Dealer: Tell ya what, Captain Slipup. Call the rest of the Mosquito Armada....

Captain Slipup interrupts: How dare you insult the Lord Emperor...

Dealer interrupts: Enough with the fancy titles! Call off the Mosquito Hordes from pursuing The Blazing Muffin, and we'll let you go.

Captain Slipup: We have you outnumbered!

Dealer: Incorrect. Had us outnumbered. Past tense. Check your sensors. There are 20 ships from Lechuga Prime now within weapons range of you. Ships much bigger than mosquitoes, and with more advanced tech. We've got anti-engine heat resistant goo guns, quantum-flip pulse torpedoes, warbling sonic shockwave cannons, not to mention our secret weapons.....

Captain Slipup: Just a moment. I'll talk with Captain Stingus.

Tom: They'll back off, right?

Pokher: They should, unless they have a death wish.

Captain Slipup returns to the screen: We will allow your ship to return.

Blackjack: Stop scrambling the communication with my ship. I want proof.

A moment later, a call comes in from The Blazing Muffin.

Pixel: Hey guys. I'm on my way back.

Pokher: Are you ok?

Pixel: Tired of hunting mosquitoes, but other than that, I'm fine.

Blackjack: And the ship?

Computer: Minor damage to the shields, and we're down a couple of cleaning bots.

Blackjack: Dealer, let me talk to Captain Slipup again.

Captain Slipup reappears (annoyed): You again?

Blackjack: You're the one that helped coordinate an attack on my ship! The nerve...Anyway, my ship lost some cleaning bots because of your hordes of mosquito marauders. You need to replace them.

Captain Slipup: But we don't use cleaning bots.

Blue: That's disgusting.

Pokher: But you are aware of what a cleaning bot is, and can build them, right?

Captain Slipup (defiant): Nope.

Dealer: You're a terrible liar. I know enough about my distant cousins to know that they can build a cleaning bot on Lechuga Subprime.

Captain Slipup: Oh, all right. You'll have them by tomorrow.

Dealer: Tonight will be better.

Captain Slipup: All right, but the Lord Emperor....

Dealer: I said enough with the fancy titles!

Later that night, the Mosquito Armada has retreated and new cleaning bots have been delivered to The Blazing Muffin. The whole crew is back on board.

Pokher: Pixel, you did well.

Pixel: See? Aren't you glad you didn't leave the new guy behind? No offense, Tom.

Tom: Yeah, whatever.

Blackjack: Ok, let's get back down to the surface and have some Lechuga Prime Libations!

Tom: I do love me some libations!

Blue: Just be careful, Tom. Lechugas are famous for their drinking games.

The Blazing Muffin starts descending to the surface.

Tom: Hey, why didn't we just land in the first place?

Everyone does facepalm equivalent.

Meanwhile, on board Captain Stingus's ship, Captain Stingus is on a call with Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Imperial Military Strategist and Chef, Lord General Spiteus Maximus.

Stingus: Our mission was a partial success.

Spiteus: Which means a partial failure.

Stingus: We managed to gather enough information from the interior of their ship so that we may copy some of their technology.

Spiteus: I suppose you did well enough to be spared your position within the hierarchy.

Stingus: Thank you, my lord.

Spiteus: But not promoted.

Stingus: Understood, my lord.

Spiteus: You should really work on your groveling skills.

Stingus: Yes, my lord.

Spiteus: Long live Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture.

Stingus: Long live Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture.

Communication terminates.

Episode 4

Scene 1

In the Rec Room of The Blazing Muffin, Blackjack and Pixel are playing a game called “Ringfish” with Pokher. Tom comes in and sees just as Blackjack has a near miss at Pokher’s swordfish nose.

Blackjack: Ah, so close!

Tom: What are you guys doing?

Pixel: We’re playing “Ringfish”.

Tom: Can I play?

Pixel: Sure, why not? I’m sure Pokher won’t mind. It just means she gets to eat more. Basically, you take a ringfish and try to land it on Pokher’s nose.

Tom: So I’m throwing fish at her face?

Blackjack: That’s the essence of the game, yes. But she enjoys it. Don’t you Pokher?

Pokher: Used to play it all the time on my home world, Planet Tippity.

Tom picks up a ringfish.

Tom (freaked out): Ew! So slimy!

Blackjack (mocking): Amateur!

Tom launches the ringfish and it snags perfectly on Pokher’s nose. She happily gobbles it up.

Pixel: Beginner’s luck!

Pokher: I’m starting to like this new guy.

Tom: You guys have weird ways to pass time.

Pixel: Weird? Really? Humans have some strange ways of passing time.

Tom: Like what?

Pixel: Like watching fictional shows that always have a ruling class in the foundation of the story.

Blackjack: Truly mind-blowing.

Tom: That's true, I guess. You don't have fiction stories where you're from?

Blackjack: On my world, Planet Bling, we love fictional stories, but they always take place in an anarchy-based society.

They're interrupted by an audio message from Blue, who is on the bridge steering the ship.

Blue: You guys might wanna get up here.

Blackjack: What's wrong?

Blue: Just come up here.

They all walk to the bridge.

Blue: We're approaching Planet Minus.

Blackjack (upset): What?! That's exactly what you were not supposed to do!

Pokher (scolding): You had one job!

Blue: I blame the computer.

Computer: Leave me out of this.

Tom: What's wrong with Planet Minus?

Pixel: Nothing wrong with the planet itself. The problem is that it's a big mining area in this sector, and so the CUPGASS has a star base nearby.

Computer: Speaking of CUPGASS, one of their imperial cruisers is cutting us off, charging weapons, and calling.

Blackjack: All stop. Shields up to max. I guess we'll have a chat.

Two life forms with a glittering variety of medals and pins on their uniforms appear on the viewscreen.

Admiral Illu: I am Admiral Illu of the Coalition of United Planets Galaxies and Star Systems.

General Sion: And I am General Sion. You have an unidentified ship and are crossing into restricted space.

Blackjack: I am not obligated to identify myself to anyone. We had a simple navigational error. (gives side-eye to Blue) I've done nothing wrong. You two, on the other hand, are cutting off my path and aiming weapons at me.

Admiral Illu: This is the exclusive mining zone for CUPGASS members only.

Blackjack: By the looks of all the silly decorations on your uniforms, you probably boss a lot of people around. I am not one of those people.

General Sion: Our sensors indicate that you have unlicensed and banned technologies on your ship. Prepare to be boarded.

Blackjack: Computer, cut communications with CUPGASS ship.

Screen goes blank.

Pokher: Think they're bluffing?

Blackjack: Probably not a bluff.

Blue: I sent out a distress signal with details of our situation to all free ships in the area.

Blackjack: Any response?

Pixel: Not yet.

Tom: Are they trying to board us?

Blackjack: They can't with our shields up.

Tom: So they're gonna shoot us.

Pokher: That's the assumption. And we can't shoot first.

Computer: Not a problem. They're shooting at us.

Blackjack: Pixel, do your thing.

Pixel: Taking evasive maneuver accidental rendezvous alpha.

Tom: What the heck does that mean?

Pixel: Not now, Tom!

Pokher: They're targeting our shields with shield scatter ray guns.

Tom: Why do all weapons have such long-winded names?

Everyone ignores Tom.

Pixel: We're getting a message from a Ritmo ship.

Computer: Hey, how did you get that message before me?

Pokher: This is no time for jealousy, computer!

Blackjack: Remind me to program jealousy out of the computer later. What's the message?

Pixel: They've given us a code to use in our frequency generator. They say the frequency it creates will disable their shields while making it look like a simple power surge.

Blackjack: How long will their shields be down?

Pixel: Less than a second, but long enough to get a shot at them.

Pokher: Ok, when you fire the frequency at their shields, launch a quantum-flip torpedo at them.

Computer: Quantum-flip torpedo launch system is down.

Blackjack (disgusted): Still? I thought we had that fixed.

Computer: Our shields are under fifty percent. You might wanna hurry up.

Blackjack: Ok, disable their shields, launch the anti-engine heat resistant goo gun at their engines, then book it out of here at Zip Factor Eight.

Pixel: Initiating frequency, firing goo gun.

There is a flash from the CUPGASS ship as their shields momentarily go offline. At the same time, enormous balls of heat-resistant goo land on their engines.

Pixel: It worked! We're out of here!

The Blazing Muffin streaks away.

Pixel: There is something else coming up on sensors near the CUPGASS ship.

Computer: It's the Mosquito Armada. They're back.

Blackjack: Are they attacking the CUPGASS ship?

Computer: It's hard to get a lot of detail from this range, but it appears so.

Tom: Is this their first encounter?

Pokher: As far as we know.

Tom: Violent gangs with fancy titles fighting each other. Sounds a lot like humans on Earth.

Blackjack: Pixel, set up a rendezvous with the Ritmo ships. We owe them one, and maybe we can head over to Planet Ritmo for a bit.

Tom has thoughtful look on face.

Blue: What is it, Tom?

Tom: That word, Ritmo. It sounds familiar. (pause) Oh yeah! I remember. "Ritmo" means "Rhythm" in Spanish, an Earth language. What are the odds of that?

Pixel: Ask the Ritmos yourself. We'll be meeting up with one of their ships, the Instrumentalis, in ten minutes.

Episode 5

Scene 1

After escaping Admiral Illu and General Sion's CUPGASS ship, Blackjack and the rest of The Blazing Muffin crew are having a rendezvous with Ritmo ship Instrumentalis.

Blackjack: I'm glad you're getting to meet the Ritmo species so soon, Tom.

Tom: Why is that?

Blackjack: They are similar to humans in many ways.

Blue: But they do have exceptionally large ears.

Blackjack: True. That's one reason they have such a wide range of musical ability.

Pokher: That's the understatement of the eon. They speak in musical notes, literally communicating by vibes and tones.

Computer: The Instrumentalis is approaching.

Blackjack: Onscreen.

Two humanoid creatures appear on the bridge's viewscreen. They look very much like humans, just with much larger ears.

Blackjack: Hello! Thank you for your assistance in helping us escape those space pirates with fancy titles! I'm Blackjack.

Ritmo 1: No problem. It happens a lot around this sector, actually. The CUPGASS is very aggressive near Planet Minus, which is one of Ritmo's closest neighbors. My name is Allegro and this is Libero.

Tom: Wow, they do look similar to humans.

Allegro and Libero get amused looks on their faces.

Libero: What is your name, human?

Tom: I'm Tom. You know I'm human?

Allegro: Of course. Ritmos and Humans are very closely related species. Human musical prowess isn't as proficient as ours, but it's still one of the best we've heard.

Libero: If only their logic and morals were equally proficient.

Allegro: Indeed. Please don't be offended, Tom.

Tom: I'm not. I know how screwed up Earth's society is.

Libero: Well, let's not waste any time. Let's go to Ritmo! May we beam over to your ship, Blackjack?

Blackjack: Of course.

Allegro: We'll put The Instrumentalis on auto pilot and bring a bottle of Ritmo's finest Animato Ale!

Meanwhile, on the CUPGASS Imperial Cruiser, Admiral Illu and General Sion have been detained and boarded by Captain Stingus Maximus of Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture. Stingus Maximus is hovering near the heads of Illu and Sion.

Stingus: It appears we have a common enemy.

Illu: We do?

Stingus: Those lawless vagabonds that escaped you just as my mighty fleet arrived.

Illu: Yes.

Sion: And no.

Stingus: What do you mean?

Illu: Creatures of their type, they have no central command.

Sion: They operate alone.

Stingus: They might not have a central command, but they're not alone. They received help from others when they escaped us.

Illu: There are many like them in the universe, lawless creatures and lawless worlds.

Sion: When we cross paths with such vile creatures, we do our best to conquer or kill them.

Illu: Yes, they are a threat to order.

Sion: The greatest threat the universe has ever seen!

Stingus: As I said, we have a common enemy. I have a proposition for you.

Illu: What is it?

Sion: Does it involve letting us go?

Stingus (rolls little bug eyes): Yes, it does.

Illu and Sion get excited and squirm in their seats.

Stingus: Before their ship escaped us, we were able to board it and gain valuable information about their technology. I'll share this information with you if you grant mining rights to the Splat Culture on Planet Minus.

Illu (scoffs): We don't have the authority to do that! Such a concession must be granted through a painstaking bureaucratic process and be approved by the top members of the dark occult ruling class, not to mention....

Stingus interrupts: You two are in charge of security for your government's operations on Planet Minus, right?

Illu: Well....

Sion: Yes.

Stingus: Look, I don't have the authority to make an alliance with CUPGASS either. What we can do, however, is cooperate out here, on Planet Minus, and nobody else has to know.

Illu (excited): Wow, you're a corrupt little devil, aren't you?

Sion: Excellent idea.

Stingus: Great, so it's a deal!

Illu and Sion agree to the deal. Stingus and his tiny marauders leave the CUPGASS ship. After they leave, Admiral Illu and General Sion talk in private.

Illu: How long do you think until we're at war with those little buggers?

Sion: Not long. I really just wanted to save my own neck.

Illu: Same here. But in the meantime, let's enjoy some fruits of corruption.

Sion: Agreed.

Scene 2

All of Blackjack's crew, except for Pixel (who is piloting The Blazing Muffin), are in the rec room with Allegro and Libero. They're halfway through a bottle of Animato Ale.

Tom: Wow, Blue, you're like every color imaginable right now.

Pokher: Yeah, that's how she is when she gets a buzz. All Swigs are like that.

Blackjack: How are humans when they consume alcohol, Tom? You seem quite jovial.

Tom: Well, it effects each person differently. There are what we call "happy drunks". Then there are "sloppy drunks". Unfortunately, there are "angry drunks". And of course there are "sleepy drunks".

Allegro: Yes, Ritmos are much the same, although angry drunks are very rare. It's really the sloppy drunks that we need to watch out for.

Computer: I wish I could get drunk.

Blackjack: Maybe one day.

Computer: We're now landing at Nocturne City.

Allegro: My place just outside of Nocturne City, to be exact.

Moments later, they all pile out of the Blazing Muffin. Tom is stunned.

Blue: What is it, Tom?

Tom: I can feel it. It's like the planet is speaking to me through rhythm.

Libero: Everything in the universe has rhythm and vibrates at its own frequency.

Allegro: It's just particularly strong here to you, because of your similarity with us, the Ritmo species.

Blackjack: That's how we disabled the CUPGASS ship's shields. The frequency we generated and launched at it was the opposite of their shield's frequency.

Pokher: So it canceled out, or neutralized the shields. Isn't that right, Allegro?

Allegro: Exactly. Using the principles of Rhythm and Vibration is quite powerful.

Tom: I had no idea.

Libero (surprised): Really?

Blackjack: Come on, you two know how primitive human knowledge and technology are.

Allegro: Yes, that's true. But such basic universal principles are not known there?

Tom: If they are, they're certainly not taught to anyone.

Allegro: Well, since this is your first time here, how about we go to Feroce Falls?

Everyone but Tom grumbles.

Blackjack: We went there the last time we were on Ritmo.

Pokher: How about Moto Market?

Liberio: You go there every time you're on Ritmo.

Tom: What's Moto Market?

Liberio: The biggest and most exotic market on Ritmo.

Allegro: Fine, let's go there. There's something for everyone. While we're gone, I'll have some bots fix The Blazing Muffin's shields.

Blackjack: Feel free to upgrade them too, if you want.

Tom: A market? But I don't have any currency.

Liberio: Are you kidding? You have the best currency.

Tom: What's that?

Liberio: You're rare.

They all are beamed over to Moto Market. There are thousands of beings milling about. The majority are Ritmos, but there are also a great many alien species. Blackjack and Pokher look around for new tech and ship-related items. Pixel gets involved in a 101 card chess tournament. Blue goes libation sampling. And Tom, well, Tom enjoys being a rare commodity with the females, much to Liberio and Allegro's amusement. They are abruptly interrupted by a message from The Blazing Muffin's computer.

Computer: Hey, we're getting a distress call from another Bling ship.

Blackjack: My home world? What type of distress signal?

Computer: General.

Blackjack: Have you authenticated it?

Computer: Of course. What type of amateur do you take me for?

Blackjack: We're the closest ones to them?

Computer: Yep.

Blackjack sends out a message to everyone.

Blackjack: Ok, sorry to cut this short, but we're going on a rescue mission. Everyone back to The Blazing Muffin.

Tom (looks sadly at ladies): Do I have to?

Blackjack: No, you don't have to, but I'm sure not coming back all this way to pick you up again.

Pokher: I might remind you Tom that you will be rare everywhere in the universe. You're the first human out here.

Tom: Oh, well, in that case.... (looks at ladies) Sorry ladies, gotta go.

Ladies frown and make tones of lamentation

Moments later, they're back on The Blazing Muffin, racing towards the distress signal. Upon approaching the Bling ship, the computer gives some bad news.

Computer: Uh-oh.

Blackjack (annoyed): Oh, what is it now?

Computer: It's not a Bling Ship.

Blackjack: I thought you authenticated it?!

Computer: I did.

Pokher: Well, you did the worst job ever.

Computer: They must know standard Bling distress codes.

Blackjack: Who?

Computer: The Awashi.

Blackjack: Awashi pirates? Shields up. Ready all weapons.

To be continued....

Episode 6

Scene 1

Blackjack and The Blazing Muffin crew are confronting a swarm of Awashi pirates.

Tom: What's an Awashi pirate?

Pixel: Originally from Planet Awash, the Awashi developed an extremely brutal and rigid social hierarchy. They also tried to control the weather on their home planet, which eventually led to the destruction of their ecosystem, making it uninhabitable.

Tom: So they've been space pirates ever since?

Pixel: No. After abandoning Planet Awash, the survivors took over one of Awash's moons, which had a small, anarchistic, indigenous population, many millenia younger than the Awashi. The Awashi enslaved most of them, and killed the rest.

Tom: So they took over one of Awash's moons, and now that's their home world?

Pixel: No. They tried to control the weather again, and destroyed the moon's ecosystem. The survivors of that left and became space pirates with no home world.

Pokher: I hate to interrupt this invaluable history lesson, but we've got five Awashi vessels to deal with.

Blue: That's strange. None of their craft have weapons aimed at us.

Blackjack: Are you sure?

Computer: Confirmed.

Pixel: The lead ship is opening a communication channel.

Blackjack: Keep shields up, and let's have a chat.

A long faced, pale Awashi appears on the viewscreen of The Blazing Muffin.

Awashi: I am Rogue.

Blackjack: Your name is Rogue?

Rogue: Yes.

Blackjack: Ok. I'm Blackjack. Why did you send a distress signal of the Bling species?

Rogue: If we had sent an Awashi signal, would you have answered?

Blackjack: Obviously not. We try to avoid violent, thieving control freaks. No offense.

Rogue: None taken. The Awashi have acted disgracefully for tens of thousands of years.

Everyone on The Blazing Muffin gets confused looks.

Rogue: Our ancestors were indigenous survivors on Windswept, one of Awash's moons.

Pokher: We're familiar with that part of your history. What does this have to do with you sending a false distress signal?

Rogue: We need help. We have escaped the Awashi hierarchy, but they'll come for us. We need help hiding.

Blackjack: Be more specific.

Rogue: We need different codes and frequencies for our shields, weapons, and propulsion systems.

Blackjack: How did you get the Bling distress signal?

Rogue: It was in the Awashi database.

Tom: Ask them how they got control of those ships.

Rogue: I can hear you, ya know. We have taken control of these Awashi vessels.

Pokher: You mutinied?

Rogue: It was necessary to gain our freedom and have a chance at a different life.

Blackjack: Please wait while I talk with my shipmates.

Screen goes blank.

Blackjack: Do you believe them?

Half say yes.

Pokher: Even if the story of their ancestors is true, a few generations have passed since then. How can we know that they have kept any anarchistic knowledge or customs?

Pixel: True. They could be playing to our sensibilities.

Blue: They are a clever and tricky species.

Tom: But you can't judge all of them based on the actions of others in their species. Look at me, for example. There are billions of humans you didn't want on your ship, but you were ok with me.

Blackjack: Tom makes a solid point. But what could we actually do for them, that wouldn't compromise our own security?

Pixel: I could help them create their own frequencies and mask their systems from the Awashi.

Tom: I could help, too.

Everyone looks at Tom quizzically.

Tom: What? I've been learning your tech and practicing on your simulation system.

Computer: That's true, and he's getting quite good.

Blackjack: Ok, we'll help them. Get them back onscreen.

Computer: Uh-oh.

Pokher: Oh, what now?

Computer: Three much larger Awashi craft are approaching. They have weapons aimed at the rogue vessels.

Blue: Not at us?

Pixel: Not yet.

Blackjack: Well, that erases any doubt about Rogue's truthfulness. See if you can open a channel to him.

Pixel: Their communication lines are down, but he sent a message before that happened. It's the shield frequency for Awashi ships.

Computer: The Awashi are firing on two of the rogue vessels! And they're firing back!

Blackjack: Pixel, get the frequency generator ready to disable their shields. When their shields are down, fire a full spread at them with the psychedelic mind-mess machine.

Tom: What the heck is a psychedelic mind-mess machine?

Pokher: A frequency that causes happy hallucinations for a few minutes, neutralizing their desire and ability to attack.

Blackjack: Then hit their engines with a matter changing missile.

Tom: What the heck is that?

Pokher: A missile that rearranges molecules, kind of like the food generators we use on the ship. One of those missiles will change whatever it strikes into a random food.

Blue: One of the rogue ships has been destroyed!

Pixel: Ok, I've got everything programmed.

Blackjack: Fire!

There is a brief and brilliant flash as the Awashi vessels lose their shielding temporarily. Psychedelic effects begin to take hold in the minds of the Awashi, and they start to stare into space, literally and figuratively. One of their engines slowly starts to turn into a carrot.

Computer: Rogue is hailing us.

Blackjack: Rogue, run while you can. Follow us and we'll help you!

Rogue: Thank you Blackjack.

The four remaining Rogue ships and The Blazing Muffin streak away to temporary safety. While they make their escape, Rogue calls Blackjack.

Blackjack: So what's your plan now? You can't hide forever.

Rogue: I would like to seek out a planet to call home.

Blackjack: Tired of being space vagabonds?

Rogue: Not necessarily, but settling down might increase our chances of avoiding The Awashi. We have limited time to find a place, though.

Pokher: Why is that?

Rogue: Our ships are not equipped with food and water supplies to last very long.

Blackjack (stunned): Those are Awashi ships, right? How do The Awashi survive?

Rogue: By plunder, of course.

Blackjack looks around at his crew. They all appear sympathetic.

Blackjack: I'll tell ya what. We'll help you install tech for food and water production. This will help you survive as long as you wish in space. Also, if you can prove that you have abandoned the Awashi ways of violence and coercion for a period of time, then I'll have my friends and family on Planet Bling help you settle there.

Rogue (shocked): You'd do that for us?

Blackjack: I'm judging you based on what actions I've seen you take, not on the reputation of your species.

Rogue: I might remind you that The Awashi are not my species exactly. Our ancestors were originally from Windswept.

Pokher: Do you wish to be known as Windsweepers?

Rogue: It is a good name.

Blue: There is a star base of my people, The Swig, near here. We can stop there while we upgrade the Windsweepers's ships.

Blackjack: Computer, set course for...

Computer interrupts (condescending): Yeah, yeah, I got it.

Blackjack (sarcastic): The first thing I'll do is swap computers with you, Rogue.

Episode 7

Scene 1

The Blazing Muffin and the four remaining Windsweepers have just arrived at a Swig Starbase. It is mostly owned and operated by Swig life forms, but there are a number of other species there as well. Pixel and Pokher are getting ready to upgrade the tech on the Windsweeper vessels. Blue is preparing to go out for some recreational activities on the starbase. Blackjack and Tom are having a chat.

Tom: Really, I could help with the tech upgrades.

Blackjack: But I want the upgrades to work, and I'm sure our new friends do, too.

Tom: I'm insulted.

Blackjack: Don't be. You've been with us for about a month and it's a steep learning curve, considering the primitive stuff your society produces. I mean, early 21st century Earth, you guys can't even come near the speed of light yet, and we're hundreds of times beyond that.

Tom (dejected): Yeah, yeah. I get it.

Blue floats into the room.

Blue: Ok, I'm going out.

Blackjack: Want some company? Tom and I can tag along if it's ok.

Blue (hesitant): Well, I'd like that, but I'm going out looking for....well, it's almost that time of the year.

Blackjack: Ohhhhhh, right. Yep, do what you gotta do, I understand.

Tom: What do you mean, Blue?

Blue: If I don't mate with a group soon, I'll have some behavioral problems.

Blackjack: That's putting it mildly. She'll start bouncing all over the ship and become the most colorful wrecking ball you've ever seen.

Blue pulses 50 shades of red and pink.

Blackjack: But hey, Blue, if Tom is with you then you're sure to attract more attention.

Blue (insulted): What, I'm not beautiful enough to attract attention?

Blackjack: I didn't mean it like that, Blue. It's just that nobody out here has seen a human before.

Blue: Hmmm....I didn't think about that. Well, ok, you two can come along. But once I find some takers, you two are on your own.

Tom: Why plural?

Blackjack: Swigs don't mate one-on-one like humanoids do. They have group mating sessions only.

Tom: I see....

Blackjack (handing two objects to Tom): Here, you'll need these.

Tom: A helmet and sunglasses?

Blackjack: When there are a lot of Swig in one place, it can be hard on the eyes. Too bright. Also, keep in mind they use telekinesis, so there'll be objects flying all over the place.

Tom: Should I wear full body armor?

Blue: Probably not a bad idea. You're pretty frail.

Tom: I was joking.

Blue: I wasn't.

Scene 2

On The Blazing Muffin, Pixel and Pokher are chatting with Rogue as they upgrade the Windsweeper ships. Pixel is split into multiple entities as it multi-tasks.

Rogue: Amazing. I've never seen your type split before.

Pixel: Yeah, being in a few places has its advantages.

Pokher: Yeah, don't ever play cards with this guy.

Rogue: Why not?

Pokher: He's a very sneaky cheater.

Pixel: I could, but I don't.

Pokher: And a terrible liar.

Pixel: Ok, I'm done reworking the codes and frequencies on all your ships. You should be invisible to Awashi. Now I just have to install some molecular rearranging new stuff synthesizers and you'll be all set.

Rogue: What are molecular rearranging new stuff synthesizers?

Pokher: They change what something is on a physical level. So you can make food out of things that aren't food.

Pixel: Or water out of things that aren't water.

Rogue: Wow! So I can turn anything into anything?

Pixel: Not even close. It does have limitations. But there are hundreds of things it can change for you. The main purpose is to keep your food and water supply up while in space for long time periods.

Rogue: And to think that my ancestors from just over a hundred years ago didn't even have electricity.

Pokher: Yeah, pretty amazing. That technological gap made it easy for The Awashi to conquer your species. Good for you guys that you kept your knowledge of anarchistic ways so now you can be free again.

Computer: Hey, I'm getting lots of alerts from nearby systems that war has just broken out between The Coalition of United Planets Galaxies And Star Systems and Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture. There is a battle raging near Planet Minus.

Pokher: Wow, that didn't take long.

Rogue: What are those long and arduous sounding names?

Pixel: Well, CUPGASS is thousands of species ruled over by a clever ruling class.

Rogue: Why clever?

Pixel: They tell people to just give part of their time and energy for the rest of their lives in exchange for spaceways and so-called protection. With the veiled threat that if people don't comply, then they'll get crushed.

Rogue: Very clever.

Pokher: The ruling class of The Splat Culture is more brutal and straightforward. They just beat people into submission from day one and don't stop.

Pixel: Which is super ironic, cuz they're literally mosquitoes.

Meanwhile, on the Swig Starbase, Blackjack, Blue, and Tom are watching a drinking tournament. There are Swig lined up twenty feet from their drinks. They're using their natural telekinesis abilities to drink from that far away.

Tom: Wow, now that's a drinking game I've never seen. How is the winner determined?

Blue: After each drink, whoever is still floating moves onto the next round, which will be forty feet away. They keep moving farther away each round, until only one remains.

Tom: You mean when a Swig is drunk, they literally drop to the floor?

Blackjack: Like a small, psychedelic beanbag.

Blue: That's an accurate description.

The round finishes and the crowd goes wild with an obscene amount of color. One participant drops to the floor.

Blue: Weak!

A group of Swig approach Blue. They invite Blue to mate with them.

Blue (to Blackjack and Tom): Hey guys, I'll be over there mating for a while.

Tom (shocked): Over where?

Blue: Over there, near the snack bar.

Tom: You're gonna mate out in the open like that?

Blue: Yeah, it's normal for us.

Blackjack (laughing): Enjoy yourself, Blue. I'll keep our naive human company.

Blue leaves with the group of Swig.

Blackjack and Tom are approached by a tall, thin, crystal-clear creature. It is a helium-breathing species called The Flotee.

Flotee: Hey, you're strange. What species are you?

Blackjack laughs at Tom's expense.

Blackjack: He's human, from Earth.

Flotee: Never heard of it. My name is Pesado.

Tom: That's so weird!

Blackjack: Why?

Tom: Pesado means "heavy" in Spanish, an Earth language!

Blackjack: Not so weird.

Tom: Whatever. What species are you?

Pesado: I'm a Flotee.

Blackjack: Flotees are helium-breathing humanoids from the Crooked Sombrero Galaxy. You're far from home. What brings you out this way?

Pesado: I'm an independently wealthy adventurer just passing through.

Blackjack: Must be nice.

Pesado: It is.

Tom: Why is it called The Crooked Sombrero Galaxy?

Blackjack: Because it looks like a crooked sombrero.

Pesado: Not too bright, these humans.

Blackjack: We're here with a Swig. She's over there mating.

Pesado: I see that. Speaking of which, I'm heading to Planet Placer. You guys wanna go?

Tom: What's Planet Placer?

Blackjack: It's a planet where the natives are quite pleasurable and accommodating. It's also just a few hours from here.

Tom: Interesting....

Blackjack: Considering there's a zero percent chance of you finding a human to mate with out here, you might be interested, Tom.

Tom: I might.

Pesado: Your ship or mine?

Blackjack: My crew is doing some work on the ship. It'll have to be yours.

Pesado: Ok, let's go.

Blackjack: I'll let the crew know we'll be back tomorrow.

Scene 3

Blackjack, Pesado, and Tom are on Pesado's ship, streaking towards Planet Placer. They are soon rudely interrupted by three warships flickering in their path.

Pesado: Whoa, where did they come from?

Blackjack: Who are they and why are they flickering?

Pesado: Those are Daemonix craft. They're subservient to the Splat Culture.

Tom: The mosquito armada? Nothing like a bunch of statist bandits to ruin your day.

Pesado: There's a rumor that they've been working on a cloaking technology.

Blackjack: Or maybe they stole it.

Pesado: That seems more likely. They're calling. I'm putting them onscreen.

A giant creature, with the body of a rhino and a face of a fox appears onscreen, wearing a ridiculous tapestry of military decoration. It is surrounded by a swarm of mosquitoes.

Tom: What's that?

Pesado: A Daemonix. They're from my galaxy, and so is the Splat Culture.

Tom: Rough galaxy!

Pesado: You have CUPGASS, which isn't any better.

The Daemonix speaks: I am The Purveyor of Pillage.

Tom: What kind of name is that?

Pesado: They like to name themselves after destructive expressions.

Purveyor of Pillage: Silence! I am the humble servant of Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture.

Tom (laughing): Real tough guy, eh? Submissive to a bunch of mosquitoes?

Purveyor of Pillage: Stop interrupting! We are in need of assistance fighting a new enemy, the Coalition of United Planets Galaxies And Star Systems. You will be assimilated into our fighting force.

Pesado: As tempting as that is, I'll have to say NO.

Purveyor of Pillage: Assimilate or be extinguished.

Pesado cuts the communication with the Daemonix craft.

Blackjack: What's your plan?

Pesado: Send a distress signal, fire everything I've got, and run like mad.

Blackjack: I'll send a direct message to The Blazing Muffin, too.

Pesado's ship fires a variety of weapons at the three Daemonix craft, while absorbing one too many blows from their warcraft. His propulsion systems fail as do his shields. They soon see landing parties coming towards them.

Blackjack: I'll get the fly swatters and glue traps!

Pesado: That's not funny.

Pesado tosses some cartoonishly bulky weapons to Tom and Blackjack.

Pesado: When they start coming in, just squeeze the trigger and keep spraying.

Tom: That's not funny, either.

Pesado: Bad choice of words.

A few Daemonix flood into Pesado's ship along with hundreds of mosquitoes. Before a shot can be fired, an invisible gas is sprayed at Tom, Pesado, and Blackjack, causing them to lose consciousness.

Purveyor of Pillage: Now we have another ship for our fleet. Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan will be pleased. Perhaps he'll give me a golden hypercube of recognition.

The other Daemonix grunt in agreement.

To be continued.....

Episode 8

Scene 1

Pixel and Pokher are still working on upgrades for the Windsweeper ships at the Swig Starbase, when they receive a distress call from Blackjack.

Computer: A distress call is coming in from Blackjack.

Pixel: Here on the starbase? What did he do, overextend himself at a card game again?

Computer: The signal came from a few light years away, on a course for Planet Placer. He says he's on a Flotee vessel that's been taken over by Daemonix soldiers and the mosquito armada.

Pokher: Do we have Flotee frequencies so we can scan for them?

Pixel: Yeah, I'll start scanning. We need to leave now.

Rogue enters the room.

Rogue: What's going on?

Pokher: Wanna pay Blackjack back for the huge favors he's done you?

Rogue: Why? What's wrong with Blackjack?

Pokher: There are lots of things wrong with Blackjack. But at the moment, the most urgent is that he's in danger. He went off with some Flotee and the ship has been taken over by thugs in uniforms. We're going on a rescue mission.

Rogue: Yeah, let's go.

Meanwhile, back on Pesado's ship, Blackjack, Tom, and Pesado wake up slowly from the knockout gas they were hit with. They overhear The Purveyor of Pillage, other Daemonix, and mosquitoes conversing.

Purveyor of Pillage: I told my cousin she's wasting her time, hustling people for air permits. She should join the military, where all the big action is. This war with CUPGASS, there's gonna be so much loot!

Daemonix 2: You really think we can beat them?

Mosquito 1: Of course we'll be victorious! How dare you doubt Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture!

Mosquito 1 zaps Daemonix 2

Daemonix 2 (wincing in pain): Apologies, that was not my intention.

Purveyor of Pillage notices that their captives are starting to wake up.

Purveyor of Pillage: Hey, the weaklings are waking up!

Blackjack (groggy): You're enslaved by mosquitoes, and you think I'm weak?

Daemonix 2: Can't we just kill them?

Mosquito 1: We could, but not yet. They might prove useful.

Purveyor of Pillage: How could they possibly be useful?

Mosquito 1: Well, for one thing, we don't know what half the weapons on this ship can do. Also, they have dealt with the CUPGASS for years and might have valuable information.

Tom: He's right, we are very valuable.

Mosquito 1: I'm a she.

Tom: Kinda hard to tell from here. You're a mosquito.

Mosquito 1 zips over to Tom and zaps him. Tom winces in pain.

Mosquito 1: I haven't seen your kind before. What are you and where are you from?

Tom: I'll never tell!

Mosquito zaps him again.

Tom: That's definitely not painful enough to make me talk.

Purveyor of Pillage: We shouldn't waste our time with him. In less than a day we'll be at the battle for Planet Minus. We need info about the ship.

Pesado: It's my ship. Just ask the central computer anything you want to know, and it'll tell you.

Mosquito: It will?

Blackjack: It will?

Pesado: Yep.

Mosquito: Why should I ask the computer, and not you?

Pesado: Because I'll be defiant, and the computer won't.

Mosquito: Computer, how do I activate the weapons array?

Computer: Hit the big red button, just below where the fuzzy dice are hanging.

Tom: Are you strong enough to hit that button? You're a tiny mosquito!

Mosquito zaps Tom again. The Purveyor of Pillage finds the button and presses it. Pesado grins.

Meanwhile, The Blazing Muffin and the four Windsweeper craft are going full speed, following the distress signal of Pesado's vessel. Pokher and Pixel are in contact with Rogue. Pixel is actually present on Rogue's ship and also on The Blazing Muffin after splitting himself in half.

Pixel: Good news. They just slowed down.

Pokher: Are they still on the same course?

Pixel: Yeah, headed for Planet Minus. Rogue, you think you understand the weapon controls?

Rogue: The goo gun targeting is a little tricky, but yeah, I've got it.

Pixel: Pokher, are we still expecting help from Allegro and Libero?

Pokher: So they say. And The Dealer is in, too.

Pixel: Are they within scanning range?

Pokher: Should be.

Pixel: Computer, coordinate our arrival time with Allegro, Libero, and The Dealer's intercept courses.

Computer: Why don't ya do it yourself, mister I'm-in-two-places-at-once?

Pixel: Damn jealous computer, get over it!

Computer: Time coordination set. We should all be approaching the Flotee ship in an hour.

Scene 2

55 minutes later, Pixel, Pokher, Rogue, Allegro, Libero, and The Dealer are discussing tactics as they approach the Flotee ship.

Pixel: The first thing we need to do is disable their shields.

Computer: That's shouldn't be too hard.

Pixel: Why not?

Computer: The shields of the Flotee ship are already down.

Pokher: How?

Computer: Not sure.

Pixel: I'll infiltrate the Flotee ship and take out the hijackers.

Rogue: How are you gonna do that?

Pixel: I'm made of trillions of nanoparticles. I'll send small bits of myself into each of the Daemonix bodies and disable them with an electric shock.

Allegro: What about the mosquitoes?

Pixel: I'll free Tom, Blackjack, and whoever their Flotee friend is to help deal with the mosquitoes.

Libero: And the rest of us can keep the Daemonix craft occupied.

The Dealer: I'll help with that. There's a new secret weapon I've been itching to try out.

Libero: What's your secret weapon?

The Dealer: It's a secret.

Pixel: Once we've regained control of the Flotee vessel, we'll book it full speed back to the Swig Starbase.

Meanwhile, on the Flotee vessel.....

Daemonix 2: There are eight unidentified craft closing fast!

Purveyor of Pillage: Are they CUPGASS?

Daemonix 2: No, sir. They're unidentified.

Purveyor of Pillage: Shields are up?

Daemonix 2: Yes, sir.

Purveyor of Pillage: Coordinate with our Daemonix Warships. Open fire on all approaching ships as soon as they're in range.

Mosquito: We don't know the range of this craft, genius.

Purveyor of Pillage: You, lanky fellow. What's the range of this craft for weapons fire?

Pesado: I told you, ask the computer whatever you want. It'll tell you.

Daemonix 2: Too late! They're already opening fire on our Daemonix brothers! Wait a minute, that's strange. They're not firing at us.

Confusion spreads among the Daemonix and the mosquitoes. Within seconds, the Daemonix shake violently from an electric jolt before hitting the floor. Before the mosquitoes can figure out what's happening, Blackjack, Tom, and Pesado have been released from their bindings, and parts of Pixel have reassembled into a visible form. Cleaning bots suddenly appear. One has a massive air blower, and the other has a vacuum cleaner. The mosquitoes start to panic and flutter around aimlessly.

Pixel: I hope you don't mind, I took the liberty of having your ship's computer send the cleaning bots.

Pesado: Don't mind at all.

Tom: I should remind you that there are two gigantic, psychopathic, rhino/fox-hybrid looking aliens right there.

Pesado (taking ship's controls): I would beam them back to their warship, but their shields are up.

Blackjack: I guess you'll have to send them out the airlock.

Pesado: I'll have to send them out the airlock.

Pixel: One of the Daemonix ships has been severely damaged.

Tom: That was fast. How did they do that?

Pixel: They probably used the secret weapon.

Tom: I won't ask what the secret weapon is.

Pixel: Wise choice.

Pesado: The other Daemonix warship is fleeing.

Blackjack: Well, Pesado. That was an unexpected detour from our original plan.

Pesado: Wanna resume course?

Pixel: We need to pick up Blue.

Blackjack: We'll pick her up on the way.

Pixel: One question, Pesado. How did you get the shields dropped?

Pesado: It's a safety measure built into my ship. If there's an intruder alert, all the intruder has to do is hit that giant button below the fuzzy dice, and the computer will give false readings for everything. If the shields are down, it'll say up, for example.

Tom swats frantically at his ear.

Tom: Pesky mosquitoes!

Pesado: I'll have to get my ship deep cleaned at the starbase.

Episode 9

Scene 1

Days after the Battle for Planet Minus, The Coalition of United Planets Galaxies And Star Systems is retreating after their defeat to Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan's Grand Universal Empire of the Splat Culture. They have relinquished all mining rights on Planet Minus for 99 years, as long as certain officials in CUPGASS receive a cut. Admiral Illu and General Sion are on the bridge of the USS Jeopardize. They've just finished being taunted by Captain Stingus Maximus of The Splat Culture and are awaiting orders from the CUPGASS President on their next assignment.

Illu: Nothing worse than being taunted by a mosquito.

Sion: Yes, but at least now we have a new enemy to help us justify our positions.

The communications officer on the bridge tells them that the CUPGASS president is calling.

Illu: Put the president onscreen.

Comm Officer: We're having trouble with visuals, so it'll be audio only.

Sion: What?! That's preposterous! Why?

Comm Officer: We put in a work order to maintenance last week, but they haven't been approved by central command to complete the work.

Illu: I am central command!

Comm Officer: Sorry, sir. Just relaying the message.

Sion: We're making the president wait. Put him through.

President Crown: Why can't I see you two bumbling idiots?

Illu: Um, well, we took heavy damage in the battle for Planet Minus.

President Crown: And here I thought it must be bumbling incompetence. Anyway, speaking of Planet Minus, the loss of our mining operations there is a disaster. It was the source for nearly half our Zoom ore in this sector.

Illu: Really sir?

Sion: I had no idea.

President Crown: Stop lying. Both of you are pathetic. I know you're getting a cut.

Illu: Sorry, sir.

President Crown: Don't apologize! You two didn't get to where you are in the hierarchy by being honest, decent, and straightforward and neither did I. Now, the reason I'm calling is that we need to replace our source of Zoom ore. I'm sending you two out to Ninjoctopus.

Sion: What a clumsy name for a planet.

President Crown: It's a planet full of octopus ninjas, so what would you call it?

Illu: Are we being punished for something, sir?

President Crown: Depends on who you ask, I suppose. Anyway, you will go to Ninjoctopus to make way for new mining operations.

Illu: Sir, correct me if I'm wrong, but all of the Zoom ore on Ninjoctopus is located below the ocean floor, and all of the local inhabitants live underwater.

President Crown: Yes, that's correct.

Sion: So, do you just want us to relocate them?

President Crown: Oh, now, don't jump to conclusions. Try to make a deal with them first.

Illu: Yes, of course.

President Crown: If they don't take the deal, then offer to help relocate them.

Sion: And if they refuse that?

President Crown: Then they must be exterminated, of course. But don't worry, usually one of the first two options work. And their technology is quite primitive, so you shouldn't have too much trouble.

Illu: Also, I don't think they have a central authority.

President Crown: Yes, that's true, which could make the first two options exceedingly difficult and nearly impossible. Any further questions?

Sion: No, sir.

President Crown: Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm late for a meeting with one of my physical fitness liaisons.

Transmission ends.

Illu: Is that what he calls them these days?

Scene 2

The USS Jeopardize has arrived at Ninjoctopus. Admiral Illu and General Sion are preparing an away team to make contact with the Ninjoctopus and seek mining concessions. They are in the transporter room preparing to beam down.

Admiral Illu: Away team member one, don't forget to activate your high-tech breathing apparatus before you beam down. It is an aquatic world.

Away Team Member One: Yes, sir. I'd feel better if one of you would accompany us on this mission.

General Sion: Sometimes it's necessary to lead from behind.

Admiral Illu: Does that make sense?

Away Team Member Two (confused): Not really.

General Sion: Transporter chief, beam them down.

The transporter chief slaps around some gelatinous cubes on a control board and the away team beams down.

Transporter Chief: Sir, I've lost the life signs of both away team members.

Admiral Illu: Why?

Transporter Chief: They died.

General Sion: But why did they die?

Transporter Chief: They didn't activate their high-tech breathing apparatus.

Admiral Illu: Prepare another away team at once!

27 minutes later, another away team has been assembled.

Admiral Illu: Ensign Rob, Lieutenant Berry, may you fare better than the last away team.

Ensign Rob: Why can't we bring any weapons?

General Sion: The Ninjoctopus do not allow machines in their culture. They are very primitive. We must at least appear friendly and respectful.

Lieutenant Berry: Won't the mining be done with machines? How will we convince them to do that?

Admiral Illu: You ask too many questions, Lieutenant. Transporter Chief, begin transport.

The away team beams down and are instantly submerged to near the ocean floor, in a thriving cluster of Ninjoctopus activity. They draw some curious glances from the locals, but are largely ignored. Ensign Rob approaches one of the locals.

Ensign Rob: Hey, can I talk with you for a minute?

Local: Time is subjective.

Lieutenant Berry: Do you always speak in platitudes?

Local: That wasn't a platitude.

Ensign Rob: Anyway, we're not from here.

Local (sarcastic): You blend in very well.

Lieutenant Berry: Do you wanna know why we're here?

Local: That's a very deep question.

Ensign Rob: We're here to make a deal.

Local: I'm not interested in making a deal with you, but I'll humor you. What's your proposition?

Ensign Rob: We're gonna take some minerals out of your planet's core and give you something in return.

Local: That's a bad idea.

Lieutenant Berry: Why?

Local: Because that would disrupt our entire civilization, which, in case you haven't noticed, is on the sea floor. Just out of morbid curiosity, how would you intend to take minerals out of the planet?

Ensign Rob: With machines, of course.

Local (laughing): Ah, silly foreigners. You cannot have machines here.

Local laughs and walks away.

Ensign Rob: Well, that was rude. What was so funny?

Lieutenant Berry: Oh, he's just primitive. Well, we could go around wasting our time talking to more locals, or we could go back to the ship, tell them that diplomacy and bribery are useless, and that we should just move them out of the way by force. That'll be way faster.

Ensign Rob: Whatever you say, sir.

Lieutenant Berry (calling to the USS Jeopardize): Two to beam up.

Scene 3

The Blazing Muffin crew has been on Planet Placer for a few days, getting some much needed relaxation. Tom has been fascinated and impressed with the pleasures of studying alien anatomy up close and personal. Blackjack is in a sensation palace and is interrupted abruptly with a call from Pokher.

Blackjack: Pokher, your timing couldn't be worse.

Pokher: Sorry, Blackjack. I just got a call from my sister on my homeworld.

Blackjack: What's new on Planet Tippity?

Pokher: She just got back from Ninjoctopus. She said that there are CUPGASS ships everywhere.

Blackjack: That's not good.

Pokher: It gets worse. Word is that they're going to mine Ninjoctopus for Zoom ore.

Blackjack: That planet is completely covered by water. The only place to mine is under the sea floor.

Pokher; Which would completely destroy the Ninjoctopus way of life.

Blackjack; That's insane. No Ninjoctopus would never agree to that.

Pokher: Of course none of them would. They don't even allow machines. So that's why I'm calling you. We should go help them. Some Tippities are going, too.

Blackjack: Well, I guess stopping a million year old civilization from being destroyed by a bunch of statist control freaks is a good reason to interrupt my vacation.

Pokher: I thought so.

Blackjack: Can't they figure out how to zoom around the universe without violence and coercion?

Pokher: They can. But will they?

Blackjack: Well, I'm not holding my breath. Ok, call everyone back to the ship.

An hour later on The Blazing Muffin, Blackjack and his crew are all gathered on the bridge.

Blackjack: Computer, is everyone here?

Computer: Affirmative.

Blackjack: Is everyone sober?

Computer: Close enough.

Blackjack: Set a course for Ninjoctopus, maximum zip.

The Blazing Muffin streaks towards Ninjoctopus.

Tom: What's on Ninjoctopus?

Blue: An ancient culture of anarchist Ninja octopi.

Pokher: There are CUPGASS ships there now. When we arrive, I'll go to the planet's surface and make contact with my Ninjoctopi friends.

Tom: Can I go?

Pokher: No, and stop interrupting.

Tom frowns.

Pokher: I'll offer assistance in thwarting the CUPGASS threat.

Pixel: What if they say no?

Blackjack: Then we'll leave.

Scene 4

On the USS Jeopardize, Admiral Illu and General Sion are talking with Ensign Rob and Lieutenant Berry.

Lieutenant Berry: We tried really hard, sir. Diplomacy and bribery have failed. I recommend just moving them out of the way for their own good.

Admiral Illu: You were only down there for an hour.

General Sion: Not very thorough.

Ensign Rob: You try being underwater for an hour.

Admiral Illu: Watch your tone, Ensign!

General Sion: Well, we might as well prepare the mining teams to go down tomorrow. We'll coordinate security for them with the USS Demoralize.

Admiral Illu: Ensign Rob and Lieutenant Berry will lead mission security teams.

General Sion: You really think we can count on them?

Admiral Illu: They're the best we have, unfortunately.

Lieutenant Berry: We're right here. We can hear you.

Admiral Illu: You'll go back and lead the mining operations tomorrow. If the locals give any push back, do whatever is necessary to get rid of them.

Ensign Rob: Yes, sir!

To be continued.....

Episode 10

Scene 1

The Blazing Muffin has just gone into orbit around Ninjoctopus and sent Pokher to the underwater world of the Ninjoctopi. Pokher navigates through a breathtaking array of crystal structures on various levels and depths. It is a vibrant and colorful world of spontaneous order. She finally arrives at the structure she's looking for and finds her two friends. They are sparring in tentacle-to-tentacle combat. Pokher watches patiently as it is very rude to interrupt a practice session. After a few moments they stop, and turn their attention to Pokher.

Ninjoctopus 1: Hello, Pokher.

Pokher: Hey, Shimi. Hi Goji.

Shimi: Your sister was here recently.

Pokher: I know. That's why I'm here. She told me about CUPGASS coming to mine the planet core.

Goji: If you're here to offer assistance in the defense of our planet, we politely refuse.

Pokher: Why?

Shimi: Your defense methods would involve machines, would they not?

Pokher: Yes, of course.

Goji: And that is why we refuse. Machines cannot come to our home.

Pokher: But they're going to destroy your home. You'll allow this to happen?

Shimi: That's so silly. If they bring machines here, it will be at their own peril.

Pokher: Overconfident bordering on arrogant.

Goji: Neither. Just certain.

Shimi: Would you like to join us for a feast of mollusks and funk fish?

Pokher: How can you be so calm when your civilization is about to be destroyed?

Goji: You should not be so fearful.

Pokher: I give up. I'm going back to my ship.

Shimi: Suit yourself. Very good to see you again, Pokher.

Pokher is beamed back up to The Blazing Muffin.

Blackjack: How did it go?

Pokher: Very bad. They don't want any help. They have no idea what's about to happen.

Tom: So, back to Planet Placer?

Blackjack: Firm no.

Pokher: Wait a minute. (thoughtful pause) They said that machines cannot come to their home. They don't live in orbit, so technically, if we stop the invasion from here, we won't be disobeying their wishes.

Pixel: That's an interesting angle.

Tom: Sounds like a stretch to me.

Blue: Stay out of this, Tom.

Tom: Oh, fine.

Computer: I hate to interrupt this super productive conversation, but a CUPGASS vessel is calling.

Blackjack: Put 'em on screen.

Admiral Illu and General Sion appear on screen.

Admiral Illu: Ah, you again.

Blackjack: Hey, did you win that contest for most pins and medals on your uniform?

General Sion: We are conducting official CUPGASS business on this planet. Do not interfere.

Pokher: You're mining for Zoom ore, right?

Admiral Illu: That's not your concern.

Pokher: Do you or anyone you represent own property on Ninjoctopus?

General Sion: Again, none of your business. Why does that matter?

Blackjack: Have any of the Ninjoctopi agreed to allow your operations there?

Admiral Illu: No, but the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

Pokher: You have no right to mine there or to be there without their permission.

Admiral Illu: This is your one and only warning. Leave here or be dealt with. Illu out.

Illu and Sion disappear from the screen.

Blackjack: Well, now we have a conundrum.

Pixel: Indeed. Multiple CUPGASS ships are preparing to launch small craft with mining equipment to the planet's surface.

Blue: What are you gonna do, Blackjack?

Pixel: And that's not all. They're sending five highly armed craft to the surface, with life signs in the dozens.

Tom: What's the population of Ninjoctopus?

Pixel: Remote scans are uncertain, but probably a few hundred million.

Tom: They're only sending that many soldiers?

Pokher: They know there aren't any advanced weapons down there to stop them. Beam me back down.

Blackjack: Are you nuts? Why?

Pokher: I have to at least warn them!

Blue: You can't even bring any weapons to defend yourself!

Pokher: I won't be long. Give me a chance, Blackjack.

Blackjack: Ok, I'll give you an hour. That's it.

Pokher is beamed back to Shimi and Goji's neighborhood in the crystalline labyrinth of the Ninjoctopi. After a few minutes of searching, she manages to find them meditating after their feast.

Pokher (urgent): Shimi, Goji!

Shimi: It's bad luck to interrupt a meditation session.

Pokher: They're coming! CUPGASS is invading your world and will be here any minute.

Meanwhile, back on The Blazing Muffin....

Computer: One of the CUPGASS ships is targeting weapons on our shield generators.

Blackjack: Call 'em.

A moment later, Illu and Sion are back on screen.

Admiral Illu: You didn't listen to our warning.

Blackjack: I heard ya just fine, but I just refuse to follow orders, that's all.

General Sion: You do so at your own peril.

Transmission ends.

Computer: They're firing an array of phase changing torpedoes at us.

Blackjack: Send jamming frequencies to their torpedoes.

Pixel: All torpedoes except one knocked off course.

Tom: What about the other one?

Blackjack: Stay out of this, Tom.

Tom: You never let me do anything!

Computer: Torpedo hit on our forward shields. Holding at 60 percent.

Blackjack: Pixel, take evasive maneuver "unfortunate meet up".

Meanwhile, back on Ninjoctopus, the invasion force is diving deeper underwater and reaches the crystal world of the Ninjoctopi. The machines are heard before they are seen.

Shimi: What's that noise?

Goji: Very strange.

Pokher: It's them. What are you gonna do?

The machines start to come into view as they get closer to the surface.

Shimi: I suppose we could go watch.

Pokher (frustrated): How can you be so calm?! You're being invaded!

Goji: Let's follow the machines and watch. Would you like to join us, Pokher?

Pokher: I don't know why I'm saying yes, but I'm saying yes.

Shimi, Goji, and Pokher follow the ships and mining rigs for a few minutes. The rigs stop at a spot they've designated as optimal for mining.

Shimi: They are near a crevice. So stupid.

Pokher: What? Why?

Goji: The crevice is an opening to the core. Very stupid of them.

Pokher: I don't get it!

Shimi: Be patient.

One of the mining machines crawls toward the crevice. It is about to enter. Flanking the mining equipment are a few order-followers, including Ensign Rob and Lieutenant Berry. They all have multiple machines on them, including weapons. Thousands of Ninjoctopi watch with bemused calm. Suddenly, an unspeakably huge, psychedelically colored dragon with a mouth the size of a castle pops out of the crevice and eats the mining equipment.

Pokher: What the \$#%*!

All Ninjoctopi continue to watch with bemused and calm fascination. Ensign Rob, Lieutenant Berry, and the rest of the CUPGASS order-followers scream and are quickly devoured by the dragon.

Pokher: Why didn't you tell me a machine-eating dragon lived in your planet's core?

Shimi: You never asked.

Pokher is beamed out and appears back on The Blazing Muffin.

Pixel: Ok, we got her! I'm getting us out of here!

Blackjack: Not a minute too soon!

The Blazing Muffin streaks away from their battle with the USS Jeopardize.

Pixel: What happened down there? Are you ok?

Pokher: They'll be fine. You're not gonna believe this.

Pokher quickly explains about the machine-eating, psychedelically-colored dragon.

Tom: Wow, now that's a great reason to not have machines.

Pixel: Makes total sense.

Episode 11

Scene 1

The Blazing Muffin is exploring the Dust Cluster. Everyone is on the bridge, admiring the view.

Blue: Wow, so colorful.

Tom: You guys haven't been here before?

Blackjack: Not many have because it's so remote and there aren't any inhabited worlds nearby.

Pokher (shocked): Whoa! What's that?

Blackjack: Computer, magnify ten times.

The image on the screen zooms in on a bizarre object.

Pixel: What is that? I've never seen anything like it.

Tom (squinting at screen): It looks like a....(thoughtful pause)....donut.

All turn to Tom and ask in unison: A what?

Tom: A donut. It's a type of breakfast pastry from Earth. (looks at screen again) It doesn't just look like a donut. I think it is a donut.

Blue: Why does it have a hole in it?

Tom: How should I know? I've never seen a giant space donut before!

Blackjack: A giant Earth pastry just floating around and spinning in outer space? What have you been smoking, Tom?

Tom: But that's what it looks like!

Pokher: Computer, analyze the donut. What material is it made of?

Computer: It is an unknown substance of unknown origin.

Tom: I wonder what happens if we fly through the donut hole.

Pixel: Donut hole?

Tom: Yeah, you don't see that giant hole in the middle of the donut?

Everyone looks at the hole in the middle of the donut.

Blackjack: It just looks like normal space in the donut hole. Computer, analyze the other side of the donut hole.

Computer: Pretty typical stuff. Dark matter, dark energy, space dust, cos...

Blackjack cuts the computer off.

Blackjack: Nothing out of the ordinary?

Computer: Not that I can detect.

Tom: Let's fly through the donut hole.

Blue: I'm not a big fan of going through mystery holes.

Pokher: Neither am I, but I would like to examine the donut from multiple angles.

Blackjack: Ok, let's do it. Pixel, guide us slowly through the donut hole.

The Blazing Muffin is thrust slowly into the donut hole. They all watch with fascination as they pass into the hole. Tom's mind drifts as he stares at the deep space anomaly. Suddenly, their senses are assaulted by a plethora of what appear to be multi-colored candy sprinkles, and the next thing they know....

Scene 2

A foggy-headed Tom looks around at his surroundings, and finds it quite different from his previous experience. He is in a hot and dusty place, in a small, primitive town that looks vaguely like something from Earth history. Tom looks down at himself and is shocked to see that he's wearing a decorative western shirt, bolo tie, cowboy boots, dusty old denim jeans, and chaps. He also has a couple of pistols on his hips. Then he notices his shipmates nearby, dressed in similar fashion. A horse gallops by them and startles the crew.

Blackjack: What the #*@(!

Pokher: Maybe we shouldn't have gone through the donut hole.

Blackjack: Computer, what happened?

No answer.

A young boy runs up to the group.

Boy (to Tom): You better get out of town, kid!

Tom (confused): You're a kid, I'm not a kid.

Boy: Did you bump your head, mister? Of course you're the kid!

Boy runs away.

Tom: Why did that kid call me kid?

Pixel: I dunno. All this is unfamiliar to me.

Tom surveys the surroundings a little more.

Tom: It looks like something out of the American West on Earth, or at least a bad Hollywood projection of it.

Blue: What's a Hollywood projection?

Tom: A movie.

They all look confused.

Tom: You guys don't have movies on your planets? It's a fictional story told in video form.

Pixel: What a strange way to tell a story.

Blackjack: Well, if we're gonna figure this out and get back to The Blazing Muffin, we should start moving and investigate.

Tom spots a saloon in the middle distance.

Tom: Let's talk to some people at the saloon and at least figure out where and when we are.

They walk into a rustic, neo-western saloon. A piano player stops abruptly and it gets eerily silent as the heavily mustached crowd looks at the newcomers. The bartender breaks the silence.

Bartender: Hey, kid. With all due respect, we don't want no trouble.

Tom: You're the second person to call me kid.

Bartender: You know the sheriff makes his rounds here about this time. Please, we don't want no trouble.

Blackjack: Why does he think we want trouble?

Pokher: What does he mean by that?

Tom: Yeah, um, we don't want trouble either. Could you tell me what year it is?

Everyone gets confused looks on faces.

Bartender: You feeling ok, Billy?

Tom: What, now I'm Billy? You're not helping.

The doors swing open and a gruff man in uniform with a shiny badge on his shirt struts into the bar.

Bartender: Hey there, Sheriff. (ducks down under bar)

Sheriff: Must be my lucky day!

Pixel: What's a sheriff?

Tom: Someone who thinks they have the right to use violence and coercion in a small, localized area.

Sheriff: Billy the Kid is finally gonna get a taste of justice! And I get the fame and the reward! Kid, you're comin' with me.

Tom: No, thanks.

Sheriff: Come on, don't make this difficult.

Tom: We'll leave. Just leave us alone.

Tom and the rest of The Blazing Muffin crew begin to walk out.

Sheriff: Billy....

Sheriff starts to draw a pistol, but Tom pulls it much faster and shoots the sheriff in the face. Tom and crew run out of the saloon and disappear into the hills.

Pokher: Do those names mean anything to you Tom?

Tom: Well, Billy the Kid was a famous gunslinger on Earth in the late 19th century. But why do people think I'm him?

Blue: Perhaps the donut hole sent us to a different time and place.

Blackjack: That seems reasonable.

Tom: Well, I need to find some food soon. I'm famished.

Pokher: Good luck finding any. We're in the middle of a desert.

Tom: Hey Pixel, can you analyze this plant and see if it's edible?

Tom hands a small, button-shaped, spineless cactus to Pixel. Pixel scans and analyses it.

Pixel: It seems to be an edible type of cactus. It doesn't seem to have much nutrient value, but I suppose it's better than nothing.

Everyone but Pixel eats the cacti. An hour later, they all start to feel strange, especially Tom.

Tom: Whoa, everything looks so weird. And sounds weird.

Tom projectile vomits.

Pixel: You ok, Tom?

Tom (look of realization): Ohhhhhh, Nooooooooo. I think I know what that cactus is.

Pixel: What's that?

Tom: It's Peyote, an Earth psychedelic.

Everyone grumbles and scolds Tom.

Blackjack (disapproving): Tom, you should know your home planet's psychedelics!

Pokher: Yeah, Tom!

Tom (breathing heavily): It's ok, it'll be over in a couple days or so.

Scene 2

Two days later, Tom wakes up slowly near a small creek. Curiously, there is one feather in his hair. He notes the feather, then moves on to more important matters. He sees the rest of the crew nearby, talking amongst themselves. As he stands up, he notices something very strange. There appears to be a glass wall that goes on forever, just past the creek and over a small, rocky hill. He wades through the creek. His companions notice him, call out to him, and try to catch up. Tom continues past the hill, and when he reaches the glass, is astounded even more. There appears to be a giant on the other side of the glass. When the others catch up, they are equally awed.

Tom: Do you guys see that?

Pixel: It's a giant human.

Pokher: And he's staring at us.

Tom studies the giant in more detail.

Tom: Hey, wait a minute....he looks familiar. (look of realization, screams)
That's my dad!

Blackjack: What?

Tom: But when he was a child!

The giant child walks closer to the glass and peers closer at the characters before him.

Child: Something is wrong with the TV.

Tom: He just said something is wrong with the TV!

Child looks shocked.

Child: You can hear me?

Tom: Of course I can hear you. You're right in front of me!

Child screams for his parents. They come running into the living room.

Tom: Grandma? Grandpa?

Child: Why did Billy the Kid just call you grandma and grandpa?

Grandma: Must be a defective set.

Grandpa: I'll take it back to the store tomorrow. Shut it off for now.

Child goes to shut off the TV.

Tom (pleading): Wait! Dad, what year is it?

Pixel: Are you sure you should be calling him dad? You do know about time paradoxes, right?

Child: 1990. Duh.

He shuts off the TV, but the scene remains on screen.

Child: How is this possible?

Grandpa: Just unplug it, son.

Child unplugs it, but it stays on. Tom's grandma screams and drops a wine glass.

Tom (yelling): Run away from the screen! We gotta figure this out!

Tom's family watches as he and the others turn their backs and run away.

To be continued.....

Episode 12

Scene 1

Tom and the rest of The Blazing Muffin crew have regrouped in a rocky valley and are going over their options for escape.

Tom: Are they still watching us?

Blackjack: Hard to say, but I don't think so.

Pixel: So let's talk about what we know. Tom, the young version of your father we just encountered told us it is 1990.

Tom: Right, which would make my dad around 12 at this time.

Pokher: All the people we encountered in town by the saloon thought you were some historical figure named Billy The Kid. You said he lived in the 19th century.

Tom: Right. (notices flask in pocket) Ah, what luck! Perfect time for a drink.

Blue: Not perfect.

Tom (after taking a swig): We're trapped behind what appears to us to be a giant screen. So as far as I can tell, we're in a movie from around 1990 that depicts a story about Billy The Kid from the 1800s.

Blackjack: And all this happened because we flew my ship into an anomalous donut hole in space.

Tom: Right.

Pixel: So how did we get here, and how do we get out?

Blackjack: And where is my ship?

Pixel: I have a connection with the ship's computer, and I do not sense it here, wherever and whenever "here" is.

Blue: What's the last thing you remember from the donut hole, Tom?

Tom: I was watching the interior of the donut as we passed through.

Pixel: Same here.

Blackjack: Does that go for all of us?

All confirm.

Tom: But then thinking about donuts made my mind wander. (thoughtful pause) It made me think about my dad, and then thinking about my dad made me think about stories he told me about when he was a kid. He used to watch poor quality action movies and eat donuts on Saturday afternoons growing up. He especially liked westerns. And that's the last thing I remember before we woke up here.

Pixel: Fascinating.

Pokher: So the donut hole somehow used your mental energy to send us to a different time and place?

Blackjack: Let's not worry about donut hole mechanics just yet. Let's figure out how to get back to the ship first.

Blue: It's also interesting to note that we didn't notice we were on TV until we took the Peyote.

Pixel: Not super relevant right now, but interesting side note to ponder. Thanks, Blue.

Pokher: I have an idea. This might sound absurd, but maybe Tom can just think about getting us back to the ship, and it'll help the donut hole do its thing.

Tom: Are we really on Earth right now?

Pixel: All readings from my sensors indicate that to be the case.

Tom (sighs): Anyway, sure, I'll give it a shot. I'll try to think our way out of this.

Tom closes his eyes and thinks real hard about being back on The Blazing Muffin in the year 2030.

Tom: Is it working?

Everyone says no with annoyed tones.

Tom continues thinking with his eyes closed.

Tom: How about now?

Chorus of no.

Tom: Maybe if I take more Peyote it'll help?

Blackjack: We don't have time for that.

Pixel: Maybe we should all think of getting back to the ship at the same time and see what happens.

Pokher: Yeah, I guess it's worth a shot.

Everyone thinks about getting back to The Blazing Muffin in 2030, focusing a great deal of mental energy. After a few moments, everything goes dark. Then suddenly, there is a brilliant flash. When they wake up, they take stock of their surroundings, and are immensely relieved to be back on The Blazing Muffin. Blackjack hurries to the view screen and finds that his ship is on the other side of the donut hole.

Blackjack: Computer, how long were we gone for?

Computer: Gone?

Blackjack: Yes.

Computer: Is this a joke?

Blackjack: No joke, now please answer me.

Computer: But you weren't gone, Blackjack. You were all right here.

Pixel: How long did it take to get through the donut hole?

Computer: 8 minutes.

Pixel: And what were we doing?

Computer: You were all on the floor, resting peacefully.

Pokher: The whole time?

Computer: Affirmative. Why? What did it feel like to you?

Tom: It was over two days.

Blackjack: But it felt so real.

Computer: We're getting a call.

Blackjack: On screen.

A tiny, glowing dot shows up on the screen.

Blackjack: Magnify fifty times.

The image becomes clear. There is one tiny being floating in space.

Tom: It glows like a firefly, but is shaped like a figure-eight.

Blackjack: Hey, I'm Blackjack. Do you have a name, and what are you calling about?

Firefly: Tom thinks I glow like a firefly, so you may call me firefly. Did you enjoy yourselves in the donut?

Pokher: I'm not sure 'enjoy' is the term I'd use.

Firefly: I'm sorry to hear that.

Blue: Why do you ask?

Firefly: I built it.

Everyone stares blankly at the firefly.

Tom: You built that giant thing?

Firefly: Yes. You seem surprised.

Tom: You're so small, no offense.

Firefly: None taken. Big things come in small packages sometimes.

Tom: Did all that really happen?

Firefly: Do you mean going back to 1990 and appearing in a bad western movie from the late 80s?

Tom: Yes! How did you know?

Firefly: I was watching the whole time.

Blackjack: How comforting.

Pokher: But if we were actually there, didn't our actions effect the past and cause a different future timeline to occur?

Firefly: Oh, no. That would be dangerous, not to mention silly. Why do so many sentient beings think that the future can be altered so easily? It takes very significant actions to have any widespread effects on the future. The only thing you did on your little trek was to make Tom's grandfather return that TV set to the store, and gave his father a good story to tell the other boys at school.

Tom: So if I were to ask my family about that, they'd remember?

Firefly: Yes, of course.

Blue: Isn't that risky? What if someone uses your giant, magic donut for nefarious ends? Couldn't someone go back and cause chaos?

Firefly: No. Like I said, I watch. If anyone tries anything that would obviously cause harm to our current timeline, then I throw them out of the donut hole.

Tom: How long have you been doing this?

Firefly: Oh, not long. And soon my experiment will end and the donut will be dismantled.

Blue: Such a vague, cryptic answer.

Tom: Yes, quite frustrating.

Blackjack: So if we were to go through there again, we could go to any time and place?

Firefly: Nearly any time and place, yes.

Pokher: So we could go to other galaxies almost instantly?

Firefly: Yes.

Blackjack: Could the ship come with us?

Firefly: It could, but I won't allow it. It's my insurance policy that you won't misuse the technology.

Blackjack: Could you build a smaller one?

Firefly: Indeed.

Pokher: And would you be willing to trade us one?

Firefly: Not at the moment, but it might be necessary in the future.

Tom: Why would it be necessary?

Firefly: In order to influence the battle to a greater degree, of course.

Blackjack: What battle?

Firefly: The never-ending battle between light and dark, of course. If beings aligned with creation need help minimizing dark forces of destruction, then I may have to intervene to a greater extent.

Pixel: How does it work?

Firefly: It is somewhat like a wormhole, only artificially made and much more advanced. Mental energy is necessary for it to function. You are a member of The Verse species, are you not?

Pixel: I am.

Firefly: Glad to see you're doing so well. Your creator would be proud.

Everyone gives curious glances, uncertain what was meant by that.

Pixel: You know who created my species?

Firefly: Of course. You were created in their image.

Firefly flickers and disappears.

Tom: So cryptic again!

Blue: Annoying.

Blackjack: Now what do you think it meant by that?

Pokher: I'm not sure, but I say we get out of here. We need to get to a star base and get some supplies anyway.

The Blazing Muffin zips away. Thousands of fireflies appear and swarm together near the donut after they leave.

Fireflies (thinking to itself): That experiment went well. And that's my first contact with a human in millions of years. Maybe they'll do better this time.

Episode 13

Scene 1

The Blazing Muffin has arrived on Planet Bling. It is the third spring of the year, so the Bling are having their annual Flocking Festival, their biggest celebration of the year. Blackjack is with his family for the event, and the rest of the crew is celebrating with them.

Blackjack's Family

Button – Sister

Ante – Mother

Toke – Father

Bluff – Brother

Toke: Blackjack, you put on weight.

Blackjack: Good to see you too, dad.

Bluff: You just guaranteed we'll lose the race.

Blackjack: I can still fly faster than you, big brother.

Ante: What do you expect, spending your life on a spaceship, gallivanting around the galaxy?

Button (staring at Tom): I haven't seen anyone like you before.

Pokher: He's human.

Button: What's that?

Pixel: Someone from Earth.

Bluff: Never heard of it.

Blackjack: The only human away from Earth, as far as we know.

Button (fawning over Tom): Very unique. Are we compatible?

Toke: That's quite enough, Button!

Ante: Oh, calm down, dear. It's perfectly natural during third spring.

Button: Yeah, dad. It's the Flocking Festival!

Tom: Your family is great, Blackjack. Not quite what I expected.

Pixel: Did you expect them to not be great?

Tom: Not what I meant. (embarrassed) You said something about a race?

Ante: Every third spring, lots of areas around Bling have a aerial race. Families compete in what you might call a relay race.

Tom: You can fly, Blackjack?

Everyone scoffs at Blackjack.

Blackjack (offended): Yes, Tom, I'm what you humans would call a friggin parrot, for stars sake! Of course I can fly!

Bluff: Anyway, we'll probably lose in the first round cuz of you, bro.

Blackjack: Who needs enemies when you have family like this? We're gonna win this year!

Toke: You say that every year, son.

Blackjack: Well, at least we won't come in last.

Ante: The race isn't for a few hours, so we can go enjoy the Flocking Festival for a while.

Button: I'll show you around, Tom. (sheds feather) We'll meet you all at the start point on Swashbuckler mountain at race time.

Tom shrugs and walks off with Button.

Blackjack: I should have left Tom on the ship.

Pokher: The only one we're missing is Blue. Should we call her?

Pixel: She's out soaking in all the colors of Bling. She says it's the most colorful place she knows outside her home world, so she's probably in an unreachable state of ecstasy.

5 minutes later, Tom and Button are in a secluded area of mammoth, sprawling shrubberies.

Tom: So what are some of the best things to see on Planet Bling?

Button: Oh, I'm not really gonna show you around. I just made an excuse so we could get away from them and have a mating session.

Tom (deep breath): I see.....

Scene 2

Admiral Illu and General Sion were contacted by Captain Stingus Maximus so that a meeting of President Crown and Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan could be arranged. President Crown accepted, and now awaits Dominus Khan's arrival on the USS Jeopardize. Illu, Sion, and Crown are on the bridge watching the viewscreen as they wait.

Admiral Illu: I have detected the arrival of a swarm of Splat Culture ships. We're receiving a call.

General Sion: Onscreen.

A tiny dot appears on the viewscreen.

President Crown: I can't see a damn thing!

Admiral Illu: Computer, magnify by a factor of fifty.

The image increases and a clearly defined mosquito in military regalia can be seen.

General Sion: Captain Stingus Maximus, a pleasure to see you again.

Stingus Maximus: No doubt it's better for you. The last time we met, my army was beating the pulp out of yours.

President Crown frowns heavily.

Stingus Maximus: We are preparing to board your vessel. Please allow entry to the docking point nearest your grandest meeting facilities.

Admiral Illu: Very well. How many ships?

Stingus Maximus: Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan requires a security detail of no less than 2,069 vessels, headed by Grand Imperial Military Strategist and Chef, Lord General Spiteus Maximus.

General Sion: That's impossible! We have capacity for three at most!

President Crown (dismissively): They're mosquitoes, you half-wit! It'll be fine. Just let them come in one of the cargo bays.

General Sion: Yes, Mister President.

Moments later, Crown, Illu, and Sion are in a cargo bay watching thousands of mosquitoes break formation. In the center of them all is a ship about the size of a bottle, which is outrageously large for a mosquito.

Admiral Illu: Well, that's a bit grandiose for a mosquito, now isn't it? Look at the size of that ship!

Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan: I can hear you!

Admiral Illu: Apologies, sir.

Spiteus Maximus: Use his proper title! Show some respect!

Khan: All servants in the room conserve air and cease speaking.

Spiteus Maximus: Yes, Dominus.

Khan: You just disobeyed a direct order! Now leave us. President Crown and I have many fun and nefarious things to discuss.

Spiteus Maximus: All of us, Dominus?

Khan: Are you questioning me?

Spiteus Maximus: No, Dominus.

Khan: Sure sounded like a question to me!

The swarm leaves, along with Illu and Sion.

President Crown: What a wonderful display of power, Lord Khan. It's a pleasure.

Khan: Please, just call me Khan. All those fancy titles are for the ignorant masses.

President Crown: Some things truly are universal! Very well, just call me Crown. Why have you asked to meet with me, Khan?

Khan: We have shared interests.

Crown: Do we?

Khan: Indeed. Universal domination.

Crown: The Coalition of Unified Planets Galaxies and Star Systems seeks to unify, not dominate.

Khan: Stop using fancy titles and euphemisms! We are the ruling class. Speak plainly.

Crown (relenting): Oh, all right, yes, universal domination would be swell.

Khan: Now, as you know, my Universal Empire of The Splat Culture spans not only The Crooked Sombrero Galaxy, but now, after defeating your order-followers, has gained power here in the Milky Way as well. Did you also know that my empire influences the Cigar, Whirlpool, and Pinwheel galaxies as well?

Crown: Really? They are so far off, and must be impossibly difficult to control.

Khan: Yes, that's true. I have summoned you in order to ask for your cooperation. There are certain worlds that I want your order-followers to attack. Then my swarms and I will come 'save' them from you, gaining their subservience.

Crown interrupts: I don't see how this benefits me.

Khan: Once these worlds are subservient to my Grand Empire of The Splat Culture, then we will leave those worlds largely under your watch.

Crown: That's an extremely devious and ambitious plan.

Khan: We've barely scratched the surface. Many of the worlds there have beings that are still very early in their development.

Crown: Which means they are easier to influence and control.

Khan: Precisely. Most importantly, we must occult the Law of Freedom from them. This will guarantee their obedience, as you know.

Crown: Yes, any ruler knows that. You have my attention.

Khan: Which brings us to another matter. We share a common foe in all galaxies. Those who know the Law of Freedom.

Crown: Yes, the conscious anarchists. They've been a thorn in the side of CUPGASS for centuries.

Khan: And to The Splat Culture as well. There is one in particular, though, that must be dealt with immediately. We have both encountered one called Pixel on a ship called The Blazing Muffin. Pixel is a member of The Verse species. You are familiar, correct?

Crown: Yes, on various occasions we have encountered The Verse.

Khan: Yes, they are few in number, but very diverse and powerful. If we focus on neutralizing this species, it would be very advantageous.

Crown: Agreed.

Khan: Very well. Crown, I look forward to dominating the universe with you.

Crown: Likewise.

Khan and Crown cackle malevolently.

To be continued...

Episode 14

Scene 1

Blackjack and his family have just finished one of the Flocking Races. Tom, Pixel, and Pokher are there to greet them.

Pokher: Wow, you guys barely lost!

Ante: I prefer to say 'almost won'.

Blackjack: At least I flew well.

Toke: You did, son. You fly very well for being so overweight. It's your sister that lost us the race.

The whole family gives disapproving looks to Button.

Button (offended): Hey! So I'm tired. Sorry we lost the dumb race.

Everyone turns their attention to Tom, who has his hair badly frazzled and his shirt crooked.

Blackjack: Tom, why is my sister so tired?

Tom (embarrassed): We took a really long walk before coming to the race.

Bluff: You're a horrible liar.

Ante: Oh, leave them alone. It's third spring. Your sister can mate with whatever willing partner she can find.

Toke: Well, what do you all want to do. We can watch the next round of races, or check out the Flavafruit eating contest.

Button: What about Evershine Falls?

Bluff: Or the Stackers card tournament.

Pixel: I was thinking of going to Mount Sky.

Tom: What's Mount Sky?

Pixel: The highest mountain on Planet Bling, and also the place I gained consciousness.

Toke: And also where we found you.

Tom: Found him?

Pixel: Yes, just days after I gained consciousness, Blackjack's family found me and took me into their nest. Toke, I've never asked you this, but was there anything you noticed that day that might give a clue to my origins? My creator?

Ante: The only thing out of the ordinary that I remember is the flash.

Pixel: What flash?

Ante: Just for a moment, out of the corner of my eye, I saw what looked like a brilliant flash of reddish-orange. To me it looked like a swarm of glowing insects came into existence just for a second, and then vanished. But no such insects are known to exist on Bling, so I thought it must be a strange form of spot lightning.

Toke: But it was that flash that drew our attention to your location. Bluff was just a young bird and was infinitely curious, so he wandered over and found you.

Pixel: Why didn't you tell me this before?

Blackjack: It didn't seem significant at the time. Just a strange incident.

Pixel ponders this, then looks at Blackjack, Tom, and Pokher.

Button: What's with all the looks?

Pokher: We recently encountered a very advanced life form that fits that description.

Pixel: Will you all go to Mount Sky with me?

Everyone agrees and they beam themselves to the top of Mount Sky. They are stunned to see a swarm of fireflies waiting for them.

Fireflies: Your timing is impeccable.

Tom: That's who we met at the space donut!

Toke: Space donut?

Fireflies: I have an offer for you, Blackjack. How would you like your very own mini-donut?

Blackjack: You mean the wormhole one with time traveling capabilities?

Fireflies: No time traveling, but you can go anywhere in the known universe by harnessing your mental energy.

Pokher: What's the catch?

Fireflies: The Splat Culture and CUPGASS have joined forces and are planning an invasion of the Cigar, Whirlpool, and Pinwheel Galaxies.

Blackjack: How do you know that?

Fireflies: Some of my kind have learned this.

Tom: But how?

Fireflies: We watch Crown and Khan.

Blackjack: You spy on them?

Fireflies: They are known criminals. Being aware of their plans is a form of self-defense.

Pokher: True.

Fireflies: You have encountered both empires recently and been successful in thwarting their plans. With the technology we give you, you can explore the rest of the known universe. All we ask is you do the same thing when you encounter those thugs.

Blackjack: Those galaxies are so far. How could they possibly be planning to invade?

Fireflies: Cigar is the closest, as you know, and borders the Crooked Sombrero Galaxy. It is three months at Max Zip. Pinwheel is the farthest, just over a year away at Max Zip. These are long term plans they are implementing. We, however, can transport instantly with the donut. This gives us a great advantage. There is also a new defensive weapon we can offer you.

Pokher: What is it?

Fireflies: It's called the DeDensifier.

Tom: What does it do?

Fireflies: It makes dense things less dense, and therefore easier to penetrate.

Blackjack: Like shields.

Fireflies: Like shields, exactly. We will also help get your secret weapon back online.

Tom: What's the secret weapon?

Pokher: It's a secret, Tom.

Fireflies: There are many worlds veering towards anarchy in the Cigar Galaxy, so it seems logical they will strike there first, especially considering it is also physically closer. They wish to turn the tide against young anarchist life forms and enslave them. This could throw the creative balance of the universe to an extremely negative pole. This must not be allowed to happen.

Blackjack: What do ya think, guys?

Everyone nods agreement except Tom.

Tom: I wanna go back to Earth.

Everyone groans.

Tom: I was kidding! It was a joke! I get to explore more galaxies? I'm all in.

Blackjack (to fireflies): Ok, it's a deal.

Fireflies: I'll meet you at The Blazing Muffin.

Pixel: Wait! Before you go, I have questions about my origins.

Fireflies (glows brighter): Don't ask questions you already know the answer to. I'll see you again soon, Pixel.

Fireflies flash and disappear.

Tom: Maddeningly cryptic.

Episode 15

Scene 1

The Flocking Festival on Planet Bling has just finished. Blackjack and his crew have returned to The Blazing Muffin. The Fireflies appear on the outside of the ship

Fireflies: Hello again. May we come aboard?

Blackjack: As long as you have that magic donut.

The Fireflies beam themselves into The Blazing Muffin. They reveal a small donut, no more than a few inches in diameter.

Pokher: That's it?

Fireflies: It's a miniature version of the one you experienced before.

Pixel: How does it work?

Fireflies: The same as your previous experience. All of you must focus your mental energy on where you want to go, and you and your ship will be transported.

Blue: We have very little information on the outer galaxies. How will we know where to go?

Fireflies: I'll also install galactic maps in The Blazing Muffin's computer. Keep in mind that there are still many parts of the universe uncharted.

Computer: Oh, sure, just install things in me without asking. You treat me like I'm some kind of object.

Pokher: You're a computer. You are an object.

Computer: I object to being an object.

Blackjack: Chill out, computer. Do I need to run diagnostics on you?

Computer: Sorry, I was just bored while you guys were away.

Fireflies: I'll also install your new weapon before I go.

Pixel: One more thing. Are there others like me in the outer galaxies?

Fireflies: The Verse are in all known galaxies. Have you never met another?

Pixel: Just once, in the Dragon Nebula.

Fireflies: The Verse are more numerous in the outer galaxies, so I'm sure you'll meet more. Goodbye to all of you. Perhaps we'll meet again.

Fireflies flash and disappear.

Blackjack: Well, let's take a look at those galactic charts and figure out where to go first.

Scene 2

After focusing for a few seconds, The Blazing Muffin and crew arrive in The Cigar Galaxy. They are alarmed to find themselves on a wild trajectory that they don't control.

Blackjack: Computer, what's wrong?!

Computer: We're slowly being pulled into something resembling a black hole.

Blackjack: Sounds bad!

Computer: It is!

Blackjack: Pixel, Max Zip away from that thing!

Computer: I wouldn't recommend that.

Pokher: Why not?

Pixel: It might rip the ship apart. I'll start with Zip Factor One just to test the waters.

Blue: You said it resembles a black hole?

Computer: Yeah, it has similar properties, but it's not black. It has a checkered, black and white pattern.

Tom: It looks like a black and white checkerboard! It's a checker hole!

Pokher: Kind of irrelevant at the moment!

Blue: Don't forget that we have the DeDensifier. Maybe that could weaken it.

Blackjack: Do it, Pixel!

Pixel's particles split in half and he goes to the weapons control panel.

Pixel: Is the DeDensifier online?

Computer: Just a moment, it's calibrating!

Blackjack: We might not have a moment!

Computer: Ok, give it a shot.

Pixel: Firing DeDensifier at the checker hole.

A faint flickering appears to roll through the checker hole.

Pixel: I think it's working! We're starting to gain control.

Blackjack: Well, that's a relief. Computer, what's our location? Are we near our intended destination?

Computer: We are 1,288 light years from Planet Tango.

Pokher: What? There must be something wrong with the donut.

Computer: Oh, sure, blame the technology, not the user.

Blue: Wait a minute. (pause) Didn't Firefly tell us that we all had to focus on the destination?

Pokher: Yeah. What are you getting at?

Blue: If anyone lost focus or thought about something else, maybe it could throw off the accuracy of the donut.

Pixel: Did anyone lose focus?

Everybody emphatically says no, except for Tom, who has an uncomfortably sheepish look on his face.

Blackjack: Tom, did you think of anything else?

Tom (shameful): I thought about your sister.

Blackjack (appalled): Can't take you humans anywhere! What was I thinking?

Tom: The good news is we survived the checker hole.

Pokher: Computer, what's the nearest planet with sentient life?

Computer: Based on the maps from Firefly, we're just 17 light years from Planet Deepscorch.

Blue: Sounds inviting.

Blackjack: Well, we can use the donut again and see if it takes us to Planet Tango this time, or we can spend a couple hours getting to Planet Deepscorch.

Pokher: I think that's enough donut for one day.

Everyone gives Tom disapproving looks.

Blackjack: Ok, Deepscorch it is.

Scene 3

The Blazing Muffin is approaching Deepscorch. Half the world is ocean, and the other half is desert.

Tom: Much more beautiful than I expected.

Blackjack: Computer, there is sentient life here?

Computer: Initial scans indicate a fairly primitive culture. There are no artificially created signals or frequencies that I can detect. There appear to be steam-powered, seafaring vessels. There is nothing in flight or orbit.
(pause) Hmmm, that's funny.

Pokher: What is it?

Computer: There are two different sentient life readings. One is primarily focused on water, and the other in the desert.

Blue: Two distinct civilizations?

Computer: Perhaps.

Blackjack: Is the atmosphere ok for us?

Computer: With your normal breath and gravity adapters, you should be fine. Keep yourselves cool, though. It's between 100 and 155F across the planet right now.

Blackjack: Where the desert meets the water, is it inhabited?

Computer: It is, but not as dense as on the water. And that's the coolest spot, too. It's 100 thanks to the ocean breeze.

Blackjack: Well, let's go have a look.

Pokher: You want to land or beam down?

Blackjack: Better stay in orbit and beam down. I don't want any locals getting at my ship on day one. I wanna see how they are first.

Pixel: I'll stay and guard the ship. If you find it hospitable, then I'll land and have a look with you.

Blackjack: That'll work.

Pixel arranges the controls and beams them down to the surface.

Scene 4

Blackjack, Pokher, and Tom rematerialize on a beach in a high coastal desert. There are a number of strange, twisting plants and trees sparsely dotting the landscape. They see signs of artificial design and construction on the horizon.

Blackjack: Looks like a town up ahead. Feel like a walk?

Tom: In this heat?

Pokher: Use your cooling band.

Tom (upset): Ugh, I knew I forgot something!

Blackjack: Blackjack to Pixel. Beam down a cooling band for Tom.

A cooling band materializes and falls near Tom.

There is a rustling sound in a nearby cluster of tall, spiraling trees.

Pokher: What was that?

There is a feline scream followed by a thud. A large cat emerges and dusts itself off.

Tom: Is that a cat?

Blackjack: It appears to have feline qualities.

Tom: Cats are horrible with trees on earth, too.

Pokher: Is it friendly?

Cat: Are you friendly?

Blackjack: Looks like our translators are working.

Tom: Is it wearing a ruffled shirt and a cavalier hat?

Cat: I'm male, not an it. And who or what the heck are you?

Blackjack: We're not from here.

Cat: Yeah, I can tell. You're all weird-looking. Except for the fat bird. You look delicious.

Another cat falls from the tree and startles the group.

Cat 2: Leave them alone, Scratch.

Tom: Your name is Scratch? What are the odds of that!?

Scratch: Totally common name here.

Cat 2: Let's get back to town, Scratch. It'll be dark soon.

Blackjack: Can we come to town with you? We have things we can trade.

Cat 2: Like what?

Blackjack (searching): Like that band he's wearing. Give him your band, Tom.

Tom: What?! (pause) Oh, ok.

Tom gives the band to Cat 2.

Tom: Put it around your head.

Cat 2 reluctantly does so.

Cat 2 (ecstatic): Oh, relief! It feels so cool! (looks at Blackjack) Name's Plush.

Tom (dumbfounded): Ah, come on!

Plush: Let's go to town.

Scene 5

Pixel is doing some research on the local star system.

Computer: I just picked up a signal for a split second.

Pixel: What kind of signal?

Computer: It had the frequency of the Mosquito Armada.

Meanwhile, on a ship of The Mosquito Armada.....

Commander Bitus Minimus: What happened, soldier?

Soldier: One of our ships had a cloaking malfunction and the ship blew up. It happens like ten percent of the time.

Bitus Minimus: Lord Emperor President Chancellor Dominus Khan thinks that to be a perfectly acceptable loss rate, so it must be ok.

Soldier: Yes, sir.

Bitus Minimus: Have we been detected?

Soldier: It appears so.

Bitus Minimus: Get all available ships to board the enemy vessel at once, and get me Stingus Maximus on a long-range communication relay.

Soldier: Yes, sir.

Scene 6

Blackjack, Pokher, Tom, Blue, Scratch, and Plush have been walking for half an hour. The sentient cats have been telling them about their world.

Blackjack: So most of you live on the ocean?

Plush: Yes, we are mostly seafaring cats.

Scratch: But many have been moving back to the land recently. Like our families.

Pokher: But thousands of years ago, there was a mass migration of cats off the land and into the ocean because of a threat?

Plush: Yes, we have been repressed by the Cacti desert dwellers for most of our history. We fled to the oceans to gain more freedom and survive.

Tom: But now relations are getting better?

Scratch: The best they've ever been, as far as we know.

Blackjack: And why is that?

Plush: Largely due to the knowledge given to us by the Philosopher Purr-Meez.

Tom: Purr-Meez?

Suddenly, there is a flash and trillions of nano-particles materialize in front of the group. The particles shift into the shape of a glowing cat.

Plush: Purr-Meez!

Blackjack (confused): That's Purr-Meez?

Purr-Meez: You have to get back to your ship now!

End Season 1

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